

Desolate Era

(莽荒纪)

Book 28

Archaeus Region

I Eat Tomatoes

(我吃西红柿)

Story Description:

Fate had never been kind to Ji Ning. Wracked by illnesses and infirm his entire life on Earth, Ning knew early on that he would die as a teenager. What he didn't know was that there really was such a thing as life after death, and that the multiverse was a far larger place than he thought. A lucky twist of fate (one of the few in Ning's life) meant that Ning was reborn into a world of Immortals and monsters, of Ki Refiners and powerful Fiendgods, a world where Dynasties lasted for millions of years. A world which is both greater...and yet also smaller... than he ever could imagine. He would have the opportunity to join them, and in this life, Ning swore to himself, he would never let himself be weak again! The Era he was born into was a Desolate one, but Ning would make it his era.

Original Story can be found here: [Link](#)

Chapter 1: The World Within the Archaeus Region

The Archaeus region was the core of this entire alternate universe. According to legend, it was the place where this universe itself had originated from, and it was filled with both danger and opportunity. Every single World-level cultivator would be berserk for the chance to enter it, and even Daolords would vie for the chance.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

Five streaks of light flew into the cloudy mists at the borders of the Archaeus region, delving deeper and deeper inside.

“Can you sense it?” Skyfire Brightshore sent a rather excited mental message.

“Yes.” Firesurge nodded.

“What a unique sensation.” Heartlord Solewind nodded as well.

“It truly is quite marvelous.” Prince Greatjoy sighed in amazement.

Ning was amazed as well as he carefully attuned himself to these sensations. Ever since he had flown into the Archaeus region, he had been able to sense an invisible aura of power which completely covered the entire region. This power was the power of the Archaeus region itself. If the five of them didn’t have access to an Archaeus medallion, they probably would’ve been instantaneously crushed into dust. They could sense that this mighty power originated from some place at the very heart of the vast Archaeus region.

“That direction, there.” Skyfire Brightshore pointed towards the distance. “That’s the place we need to go to.”

“The heart of the Archaeus region.” Ning and the others all nodded.

The star maps had included a detailed path from the transversal conduit to the Archaeus region. However, after they actually entered the Archaeus region they would have to depend on their own senses to advance towards

the heart of the region! The center of the Archaeus region was a place which every cultivator dreamed of entering. Perhaps the journey would result in some adventures that would test them and allow them to grow more powerful and evolve, but the center... that was the place where the true transformation would occur.

“Gentlemen, same rules as always. I’ll be the one to teleport us,” Prince Greatjoy sent mentally.

“Alright.”

“Sorry to trouble you, brother Greatjoy.”

Ning and the others did not decline. It must be understood that the Archaeus region was most likely as large as the entire Endless Territories. To go from the border regions to its heart would probably take trillions of years if one wished to physically fly through it.

It must be remembered that Ning had long ago sworn a lifeblood oath to reach Vastheaven Palace within a single chaos cycle. Chaos cycles, however, were extremely long and were calculated in the trillions of years! Thus, Ning still had plenty of time.

Whoosh.

Whoosh.

Prince Greatjoy produced a flying vessel which Ning and the others then entered. Prince Greatjoy took personal control over the vessel, sending it hurtling through the Archaeus region at high speeds as he teleported again and again. Every single spatial teleportation allowed them to cover an extremely great distance. Given Prince Greatjoy’s mastery over the Dao of Spacetime, roughly a hundred teleportations would be enough to allow them to traverse a single territory.

In the ‘normal’ universe, territories were located extremely far away from each other. The distance between two territories could be a hundred times greater than the size of each territory.

“Based on what my senses are telling me... the heart of the Archaeus region is quite far away from us. If we keep teleporting like this, it’ll take

us at least ten thousand years to reach it,” Prince Greatjoy said. “That is assuming, of course, that we don’t encounter any dangers. In reality, this place will be full of danger.”

“Let’s just keep advancing step by step,” Solewind said.

“We’ll fight fire with fire,” Ning laughed.

Whoosh.

The second day after they entered the Archaeus region. They had just performed yet another spatial teleportation. When the shuttle came to a halt...

“Quick, look.” Prince Greatjoy’s face tightened.

“Eh?” Ning and the others looked over. Ning stared past a faint layer of mist and was able to see an utterly enormous continent floating in space. Although there was a barrier of mist between them, Ning was still able to see out to a distance of a billion kilometers. He instantly saw that this continent had a few figures residing within it. He was able to make out a few dozen figures in total.

“Cultivators?” Ning frowned.

“Dozens of them? Why are there so many?” Prince Greatjoy was surprised as well.

Based on what they knew, one had to have an Archaeus medallion in order to enter the Archaeus region. This was true even for weaker cultivators like Elder Gods, Ancestral Immortals, True Gods, or True Immortals. Anyone who didn’t have a medallion would be crushed by the power of the Archaeus region.

There were very, very few Archaeus medallions. They had spent a thousand years travelling through many different territories, and as a result they had come to understand just how rare these items were! Logically speaking, it should’ve been almost impossible for them to encounter large numbers of cultivators bearing Archaeus medallions because of how rare those things were and how vast the Archaeus region was. They had only expected to encounter other cultivators after they

actually entered the heart of the Archaeus region.

“Something doesn’t make sense. They... they give me an odd feeling.” Heartlord Solewind shook his head slowly. “It feels as though the invisible power of the Archaeus region is protecting them, rather than oppressing them.”

“Right. That really does seem to be the case.” The others quickly noticed this as well.

They had entered bearing Archaeus medallions, and so the Archaeus region did not harm them. However... those dozens of distant figures were actually being supported and protected by the power of the Archaeus region.

“They are moving very slowly,” Ning sent mentally. “In fact, they are flying at ridiculously slow speeds. Most likely, even average Empyrean Gods and Celestial Immortals would fly much faster than them.”

Whoosh.

The vessel slowly advanced towards the borders of that vast, levitating continent. Ning and the others all flew out of the vessel.

“Let me take a look.” Heartlord Solewind stared hard at a nearby figure who was merely three hundred million kilometers away. He sent an invisible wave of heartforce out to completely cover that figure.

“He is very weak. He’s an ordinary mortal who hasn’t even undergone the Celestial Tribulation. Strictly speaking, he would be considered at the Wanxiang level,” Heartlord Solewind said.

“A mortal?” Ning and the others were all surprised.

In the Three Realms, it was said that after surviving the Celestial Tribulation, one would be ‘no longer subject to the rules of the Three Realms and the fetters of the Five Elements’. Prior to overcoming the tribulation, one would be constrained by the rules of that world. These people were referred to as ‘mortals’ by powerful cultivators!

“Are there actually mortals who live here in the Archaeus region?” Ning

and the others were all puzzled.

“Let’s take a look and see,” Heartlord Solewind said. He took a single step forwards, causing the space around him to shimmer as he teleported three hundred million kilometers and moved close to that distant mortal lifeform.

“Let’s take a look as well.” The others all teleported forwards as well.

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Daoist Rainskill was riding on a magic treasure as she engaged in careful exploration. She could be considered a beautiful woman who was quite famous. In just a hundred short years, she had reached the Core Formation stage.

“I’m now in the deepest reaches of the Western Wastes.” Daoist Rainskill was extremely cautious. “I hear that at the end of the Western Wastes lies the endless chaos storms. I’ve never seen the chaos storms before. I was lucky enough to be teleported deep into the Western Wastes... I can’t waste this chance to check it out.”

Suddenly...

A bald man dressed in fiery robes suddenly appeared in the air directly above the marsh in front of Daoist Rainskill. Moments later, several other figures appeared as well. There was a youth dressed in deep blue robes, a white-robed youth carrying a sword on his back, a black-robed man who wore a crown on his head, and a youth with long, crimson hair. All of them looked extraordinary.

“What? They can actually teleport straight into the Western Wastes?” Daoist Rainskill was badly startled. The Western Wastes was a chaotic place that was quite close to the endless chaos storms. Space was extremely unstable here. Only the ‘Grand Cultivators’ were able to teleport in places like this.

“Rainskill pays her respects to you all, seniors.” Daoist Rainskill was extremely respectful.

“We wish to ask you some questions.” Solewind smiled.

Without even realizing it, Daoist Rainskill began to relax. In her heart, she began to view this man as person who she completely trusted. “Ask away, senior.”

“How large is this continent? How many living beings does it hold?” Solewind asked.

“This place is the Northspring Continent. It is unimaginably vast and holds countless living beings,” Daoist Rainskill said. “The number of cultivators and monsters in this place is numerous beyond count, much less mortals and ordinary beasts.”

Ning and the others exchanged looks, all rather surprised. There were actually countless living beings here?

“But this place here is the Western Wastes. Space is distorted here, making it impossible for mortals to survive in such a place. Only cultivators would dare to delve deep into this place,” Daoist Rainskill said.

“What is the highest level of cultivation in this continent?” Solewind asked.

“First, you have the Qi Condensation stage. Then, you have the Foundation stage. Next comes the Core Formation stage... and the highest stage is the ‘Tribulation’ stage,” Daoist Rainskill said.

“The highest stage is the ‘Tribulation’ stage?” Solewind followed up on this. “There are none stronger than the ‘Tribulation’ stage? What happens after the tribulation?”

“After the tribulation, you ascend, of course!” Daoist Rainskill said, “You ascend to the Immortal realm. There’s no way back from there.”

“Are there any continents aside from the Northspring Continent?” Solewind asked.

“There are. If you go through the ancient transfer arrays, you can reach some other continents,” Daoist Rainskill said. “From our Northspring Continent, we can reach an incredibly distant continent known as the Blackfiend Continent as well as a place known as the Astral Ocean. I don’t know about any other locations.”

“Alright.” Heartlord Solewind nodded slowly, then looked at the others. “Let’s go.”

Ning and the others nodded, quickly disappearing as they left this place.

“Eh?!” Daoist Rainskill felt her mind go blurry for a moment. “What the hell? I actually started to daydream in a place like this?” She had no recollection of her meeting with Ning’s group at all.

“But... I feel very comfortable right now.” Daoist Rainskill felt a very comfortable feeling permeate through her entire body.

“What?! I’ve reached the peak of the Core Formation stage? And why does it seem as though my body has been completely transformed?” Daoist Rainskill was now truly stunned. What she didn’t know was that Heartlord Solewind had given her a glance as he left, bestowing a small parting gift upon her.

As for Ning’s group, they now stood once more at the margins of this vast continent.

“I never would’ve thought that the Archaeus region can give birth to living creatures as well,” Ning mused softly.

“Any environment can potentially give birth to living beings,” Solewind sent back. “The almighty Hegemon captured quite a few cultivators from this universe but was only able to learn a few things about the Archaeus region. It makes sense that there is a great deal of information we were unaware of.”

Ning and the others nodded.

Just now, they tested out the process of teleporting some people from the estate-worlds they held. They had all brought out people who had committed tremendous sins and were vildoers. Unexpectedly, all of them were able to survive here in the Archaeus region.

“Just now, that young lady spoke of ‘ascending’ to the Immortal realm after the tribulation.” Prince Greatjoy’s eyes narrowed. “As you all know, once you overcome the tribulation you’ll escape the rules and confines of a world. That means you will no longer be protected by the Archaeus

region itself. Without an Archaeus medallion, you'd be instantly crushed to death. Most likely, those ascendants all 'ascended' to certain estate-worlds which are probably under the control of major powers who live here in the Archaeus region. In other words... it is very likely that behind this continent is a Daolord."

"A Daolord?" Ning and the others nodded.

In the Three Realms or other chaosworlds, those who ascended and became Immortals or Gods would still be able to come and visit the mortal lands. However, here in the Archaeus region there was no coming back from ascension. Clearly, this was all due to the power of the Archaeus region, which ensured there was no way for them to return. If they wished to survive, they would only be able to do so by living in estate-world treasures.

Ning's group naturally wouldn't worry about them... but Daolords were definitely worthy of their attention and concern!

Chapter 2: Spatial Tempests

“It’s also possible that I’m just overthinking things,” Solewind said with a laugh.

“Mm.”

“There may be many things in the Archaeus region unknown to us.” None of them dared claim they knew everything about this place.

Did the mortals of the Archaeus region go to a Daolord’s estate-world after ascending, or did they go into some other special place? None of them were certain. Still, they had to remain vigilant. Given their current level of power, battles against Daolords were still quite risky for them.

“Let’s go,” Prince Greatjoy sent. Ji Ning and the others re-entered his flying vessel, then quietly and stealthily departed from this enormous continent and continued their journey via teleportation through the Archaeus region.

One year. Ten years. A hundred years...

The five of them continued to advance carefully. The Archaeus region truly was the core of this entire alternate universe, the place from which everything had first arisen. This place was filled with countless marvels and dangers as well as quite a few precious treasures. Ning’s group, however, didn’t dare to be too greedy. They did their best to avoid as many danger zones as they could, but they still encountered trouble on quite a few occasions.

Roughly 1308 years after they had entered the Archaeus region, they encountered an extremely powerful Daolord! They had come incredibly close to dying that time!

They had been teleporting through space using their flying vessel when all of a sudden, they discovered a green-robed Daolord had suddenly appeared a few billion kilometers up ahead of them. This Daolord was quite ugly, with white eyebrows hanging down all the way to his chest. He was leisurely strolling through the emptiness of space, but when he saw

Ning's flying vessel appear a look of murder appeared in his eyes.

That glare alone gave all five of them a sensation of tremendous danger.

"Leave right away."

"Flee!"

"Quick!"

All five of them could sense death impending.

"Ahh!" Prince Greatjoy furiously sent his vessel into an immediate teleport. Swoosh! Right after his vessel disappeared, a sharp thread-like streak of light lashed through the empty space where the vessel had been.

"Hmph." The green-robed Daolord's gaze was cold as he relaxed his godsense to inspect the surrounding area of a trillion kilometers. "They ran quite quickly. I wonder which master they are apprenticed to." The green-robed Daolord let out a cold snort, then walked away and disappeared from the scene.

Although that interaction had been a very brief one, Ning's group remained terrified by the memory of it.

"That Daolord was definitely at the Verge of the Daomerge! Although Daolords are quite rare here in the Archaeus region, there's still more of them than World-level cultivators. Many World-level cultivators have entered then exited the Archaeus region, with almost none of them actually staying here for an extended period of time! Given how vast the Archaeus region is, we have a much higher chance of running into Daolords than into other World-level cultivators." Solewind shook his head. "Still, I never would've thought we would run into a Daolord just a thousand years after entering the Archaeus region. Worse, it was a shameless Daolord who immediately moved to attack us and steal our Archaeus medallions. Thank goodness brother Greatjoy was here."

"That old bastard was very powerful. If I had been just a bit slower, we wouldn't have been able to escape." Prince Greatjoy also felt fear at what had nearly happened.

“It was all thanks to you, brother Greatjoy.” Ning was still petrified as well. If they had actually been forced to fight... even though Ning had those four guardian golems protecting him, there was no way he would’ve been able to defeat a Verge-level Daolord.

That near-brush with death had caused their souls and truesouls to all quiver with terror.

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To be in a ‘relaxed’ state or to be in a ‘tense’ state where you straddled the line between life and death were two completely separate concepts.

You might spend multiple chaos cycles in a relaxed state without making any improvements, but just one or two life-and-death adventures might be enough to result in dramatic gains in strength! To live a peaceful life for countless years, or to straddle the line between life and death as you reached for greater glory and greater heights? Clearly, the majority of cultivators chose the latter.

More than 2800 years had passed since Ning’s group had entered the Archaeus region.

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Boom!

“Charge!”

“Let’s charge through!”

Ning’s group of five were all aboard their flying vessel, using all their power to resist.

They were surrounded by countless spatial tempests, and their flying vessel was being tossed about by the spatial storms like an ordinary vessel might be tossed about by giant waves. They were completely unable to fight back as the spatial tempests pressed them forwards nonstop.

Ning’s group was still trying their best to resist, and Ning himself sent out an enormous streak of sword-light to tear a spatial tempest apart.

Firesurge sent out enormous waves of water to crash out against those

spatial tempests.

Skyfire Brightshore had been growing noticeably more powerful ever since he had entered this alternate universe. He was now working alongside Firesurge, and the two were combining their skills in fire and water.

Greatjoy and Solewind were doing their best as well.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The flying vessel was still being buffeted and tossed about by the spatial tempests.

“Won’t work. We can’t charge through.” Prince Greatjoy shook his head. “The difference in power between us and these spatial tempests is too great. These spatial tempests are simply too violent. Even my control over spacetime won’t be enough to calm them.”

“Ugh.” Firesurge frowned.

“Let’s just go with the flow, then.” Solewind chuckled. “This isn’t exactly the first time we ran into something like this.”

Ning nodded as well, then laughed, “These spatial tempests won’t always maintain such a high level of strength. If we just follow the flows, eventually we’ll reach a spot where things calm down.”

The Archaeus region was filled with many dangers, and they had encountered spatial tempests on quite a few occasions by now. Although Ning, Solewind, and the others all had certain trump cards they could use, these naturally occurring phenomena really weren’t worth the cost.

They ended up following the flows of the spatial tempests for nine more months.

“The spatial tempests are actually growing stronger and stronger.” Prince Greatjoy continued to helm the flying vessel through the storms, seeking a relatively easier ‘path’ for them to traverse.

“Everyone, look over there!” Prince Greatjoy suddenly called out.

“Land.” Ning and the others turned to stare as well, only to see an utterly

enormous continent hanging in the void just past the spatial tempests.

“There’s actually land here? Hopefully this continent will have actual people living on it.” Ning and the others revealed looks of delight.

A short while later, Ning and the others all descended upon the great continent. The edges of this continent were surrounded by strange whirlpools of power that continuously weakened the spatial storms that swept towards the continent. By the time they made it a few billion kilometers into the heart of the continent, things were completely calm.

“An ancient, major power has passed by this continent before.” Ning’s group advanced through a desolate desert. This place was still considered as being part of the ‘border regions’ of this continent. The environs were quite harsh and not suitable for life.

Heartlord Solewind raised his head and stared off into the distance. “I can dimly sense that this entire continent is covered by an enormous formation which is diverting the power of those spatial tempests. This formation must’ve been left behind by a major power.”

“Yes, a major power has been here.” Prince Greatjoy stared towards a place roughly a billion kilometers away. “This continent is filled with countless living beings. It is very likely that this continent holds a spacetime transfer array.”

“Haha, it’ll be much easier for us to leave if we can move through a spacetime transfer array.” Ning laughed.

“Remember that time from five hundred years ago, when we were trapped in that sea of fire and unable to escape? In the end, we discovered that there was actually a continent located deep within the sea of fire.” Skyfire Brightshore couldn’t help but reminisce about this. “That continent was also filled with many living beings, and it also had a spacetime transfer array. It even had an estate left behind by a Daolord. Thankfully, that Daolord had left long ago, and so we were able to easily enter the spacetime transfer array and reach a different area. It actually shortened our journey considerably.”

Ning and the others all nodded. By now, they had spent nearly three

thousand years in the Archaeus region, and they had accumulated a great deal of experience.

The Archaeus region was filled with countless continents that were in turn filled with many living beings. Small continents were generally ten billion kilometers in size, while larger ones could be a trillion kilometers in size! There were often traces of ancient major powers having passed through these places, albeit very few of them would actually set up residence. There was no point in living alongside ordinary mortals, after all.

However, virtually every single continent with living beings on it had a spacetime transfer array!

Ning's group, however, didn't dare to randomly use those arrays without doing some careful investigations. They'd rather continuously teleport through the Archaeus region than accidentally run into a reclusive Daolord who was residing within one of those continents!

"I hope things work out this time," Ning sent mentally.

"Don't worry, Darknorth. Even if there are Daolords residing in this continent, Daolords often go into closed-door meditation sessions that last a million years or more. We'll move in and depart immediately. There's no way we'll be unlucky enough to run into one," Greatjoy chortled.

"Just be careful, everyone. Don't randomly send out your godsense to search this place," Solewind warned.

If you swept a region with godsense, you might be able to discover a Daolord... but that Daolord would also discover you!

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Ning's group of five advanced through the continent, quickly reaching a place which was bustling with life and activity.

This place was a city known as Thousand Mountains, a place where the eight major sects of the region all recruited disciples from.

In the city of Thousand Mountains resided an old freak known as 'Old

Demon Qixiu'. He truly was the number one expert of this region, superior to all others in the eight major sects. However, he was a very low-key figure who very few people knew about.

"Patriarch." As the Old Demon walked out of his room and through his estate, quite a few servants and retainers would call out to him with respect when they saw him.

"Ugh. This world places enormous restrictions on my power." The Old Demon's gaze drifted off into the distance as he stared at the mountain ranges outside the city of Thousand Mountains. "And yet, I really just can't bear to leave..."

"Eh?" The Old Demon's face suddenly turned pale. Five figures had suddenly appeared next to the lake nearby him. They were Ning, Solewind, and the others.

Chapter 3: Transfer Array

Upon seeing the five, Old Demon Qixiu could sense that his very soul was beginning to shudder. He swallowed, hard, then bowed and said respectfully, "Greetings, five seniors."

Good heavens! He stood at the very peak of power in this world. By all rights, he should've been invincible, and yet... why was it that these five were unfathomably more powerful than him?

"I have a few questions for you," Heartlord Solewind said with a smile.

"Please ask, senior." The Old Demon was quite cautious, but even he himself didn't realize that deep within his heart, a seed of trust was beginning to blossom towards this bald, red-robed youth.

"What is the name of this continent?" Solewind asked.

"This continent is quite vast, stretching hundreds of billions of kilometers," the Old Demon said. "Because there are so many mortals living here, we refer to this continent as the Mortal Realm."

Solewind nodded slowly. "Has anyone ever left this 'Mortal Realm' and ventured off into other continents?"

"There's only one way to do that. You'd have to activate the ancient transfer array and head to the the Sacred Immortal Realm," the Old Demon said.

"Sacred Immortal Realm?" Solewind asked. Upon hearing this, Ji Ning, Greatjoy, Firesurge, and Skyfire all revealed smiles. They were going to be able to leave this place.

This entire continent was surrounded by spatial tempests, making it impossible for them to leave. Only by using a spatial transfer array to go to another continent would they be able to escape.

"This entire continent holds just a single transfer array within it," the Old Demon said. "Supposedly, an incredibly long period of time ago there was a major power from the Sacred Immortal Realm who descended upon this continent who personally set up the array. There's no way for the

cultivators of our Mortal Realm to come up with such a complicated array.”

Ning and the others all laughed. Most likely, this spacetime transfer array leading to the Sacred Immortal Realm was something which had been personally established by an extremely powerful Daolord.

“Here in our Mortal Realm, the elemental energy of Heaven and Earth is very sparse. It is incredible if you can even reach the Nascent Soul stage. To reach the Apotheosis stage is even more difficult.” The Old Demon continued, “Thus, countless Nascent Soul cultivators and Apotheosis cultivators shall gather from throughout the continent and travel through the array towards the Sacred Immortal Realm. According to the Apotheosis cultivators who came back from that place, the elemental energy there is far denser than it is here in our Mortal Realm, making it easier to cultivate and easier to overcome the tribulation.”

‘Nascent Soul’, ‘Apotheosis’... these were different terms for Ki Refiners. In the Three Realms, the mortal ranks were Zifu Disciple, Wanxiang Adept, Primal Daoists, and Void-level cultivator. This represented what the most perfect Ki Refining systems in the Three Realms could accomplish.

However, in the Endless Territories and in this alternate universe there were many different mortal races that used different Ki Refining techniques which had different terms and titles.

“Where is the transfer array?” Solewind asked.

“Here is a map.” The Old Demon immediately took out his treasured map.

Solewind glanced at it while simultaneously flipping through the Old Demon’s memories, wiping away all traces of this encounter.

“Time to leave,” Solewind said. The five immediately vanished.

“What just happened?” Old Demon Qi Xiu stared at his surroundings. “Why do I have the feeling that something is off...” The Old Demon frowned but wasn’t able to comprehend what had just happened.

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Afterwards, Ning's group chatted with two other Apotheosis cultivators who were considered extremely powerful in this continent. Everything they said was roughly the same as what the Old Demon had said.

The five of them road atop a cloud, staring down at the lands below.

"It is true that the elemental energy in this continent is quite sparse." Ning nodded. "It is true that mortal cultivators would find it very hard to train here."

If there was no elemental energy at all, there would be no way to cultivate whatsoever. The elemental energy in this continent was only enough for someone to just barely reach the Primal Daoist stage. If you wished to reach the Void level and become an Earth Immortal, it would be extremely difficult. The 'Old Demon' which Ning's group had questioned would've been considered a Void-level Earth Immortal in the Three Realms.

"It is because of the formation which covers this entire place," Solewind said. "This formation covers everything, drawing power from the entire continent. That's why the elemental energy in this continent is so sparse! Still, the reason this continent is protected from the spatial tempests is because of this formation."

"The Sacred Immortal Realm should be a continent where the density of elemental energy is normal," Firesurge said. "However... as a result, the living creatures here refer to it as the 'Sacred Immortal Realm'."

"When there's a difference in density of elemental energy, it's only normal that there one realm is viewed as higher and one realm is viewed as lower."

Ning and the others chatted as they advanced through the clouds and moved towards the ancient transfer array. They stared at it from afar.

The ancient transfer array took up an extremely wide amount of space. The entire formation itself covered hundreds of millions of kilometers, and its core components were extremely complicated and exquisite.

"It really is a spacetime transfer array." Ning and the others were able to

recognize it at one glance.

“Ahah. Quite lively here.” Prince Greatjoy glanced downwards, then let out a surprised sigh.

“These so-called ‘Nascent Soul’ cultivators and Apotheosis cultivators really are frighteningly numerous.” Solewind let out a laugh. This was the only spacetime transfer array within the entire continent. As a result, this place naturally attracted countless Nascent Soul cultivators and Apotheosis cultivators from throughout the continent, making it very bustling. In fact, an enormous city had been erected here.

This city was filled to the brim with Nascent Soul cultivators and Apotheosis cultivators. There had to be hundreds of millions of them.

Ning couldn’t help feel secretly amazed. This continent was hundreds of billions of kilometers in size, making it much vaster than the entirety of the Three Realms. Although in quality of elemental energy it was inferior to the Three Realms, its vastness resulted in the existence of hundreds of millions of Nascent Soul cultivators and Apotheosis cultivators. Any one of them would be considered a local hegemon when scattered in any of the other places in this continent.

“Let’s enter the city.”

“Let’s go take a look.”

Ning and the others walked through the city, moving directly towards the transfer array.

“I’ve been trapped at the Nascent Soul level for far too long. The density of elemental energy in Heaven and Earth is simply too low. I failed both of my attempts at reaching Apotheosis. Once I enter the Sacred Immortal Realm, I’ll be able to reach Apotheosis. I might even have a chance at overcoming my tribulation and reaching ascension!” The various cultivators in the city were chatting amongst themselves.

“I’ve become an early-stage Apotheosis cultivator, but I’m not able to improve any further. There just isn’t enough elemental energy here. Perhaps I’ll be able to become a Celestial Immortal once I go to the Sacred

Immortal Realm.”

“This array only activates once every hundred years. I have to wait sixty-one more years. This really does make me impatient.”

“We’ve waited thousands of years, my brother. What’s another few decades?”

The eyes of the countless cultivators in the city were filled with eagerness. They had already reached the end of the path they could traverse here within the ‘Mortal Realm’. Only in the Sacred Immortal Realm would they have a chance to continue their path.

But none of them realized that those five seemingly-ordinary men who just walked past them were major powers who were truly capable of virtually anything! Even those ‘Celestial Immortals’ they dreamed of becoming would be wiped out in the billions by these five cultivators.

“Once every century?” Skyfire Brightshore frowned. “This spacetime transfer array only activates once every century?”

“Each activation uses up some energy. When this spacetime transfer array was created by that ancient power, only a few chaos jewels were left behind to guide it in gathering the surrounding natural energy into itself. It takes a century for it to accumulate enough energy to be activated,” Heartlord Solewind said. “My guess is that the Sacred Immortal Realm is located extremely close to this continent, which is why the activation can be as frequent as once every century. If it was farther away, it would probably be once every thousand years.”

Ning and the others nodded. This was different from the spacetime transfer arrays of the Endless Territories; if you were willing to pay enough chaos nectar, it could be activated for you whenever you wished! This array here in the alternate universe had been created by a major power, apparently out of an act of selflessness. Of course, it was also possible that this was done by the Church of Annihilation.

“Let’s go. We’ll first find a place to wait it out. Sixty-one years from now, we’ll come back,” Solewind said.

“We have no other choices.” Skyfire felt quite resigned.

It was possible for them to pour energy into the formation and activate it by force, but... once they did so and the transfer array became active, any reclusive Daolord in either this continent or the Sacred Immortal Realm would immediately realize that something was wrong! For the array to suddenly fire off before the hundred year mark had to mean that something had happened. Thus, they had no choice but to wait patiently.

In this continent, there was a place known as ‘Wintermount’.

Ning’s group of five secluded themselves here within the mountains forests, occasionally sipping wine, fishing, and sparring. Life was quite relaxing as they waited for the spacetime transfer array to activate.

Whoosh.

A fishing pole flicked upwards, followed by a fat fish being yanked out of the surface of the water. It fell down onto the bank, still flopping furiously.

“Haha, we’ll have fish soup tonight.” Ning put the fishing pole on his back as he walked through the forests. For the past thirty-plus years, he had lived the life of an ordinary mortal.

Rumble. Rumble. Rumble. A series of sounds rang out from afar. Curious, Ning walked in that direction.

A young man dressed in simple clothes whose temples were graying was seated there, using a wooden drill to drill into a piece of wood. As the wooden drill ground away, those grinding, rumbling sounds could be heard.

“I’ve never met you before.” Ning laughed. “You new?”

“I just moved here.” The gray-templed youth raised his head to smile towards Ning.

“At such a young age, you’ve chosen to live by yourself in a desolate mountain wilderness, rather than in a city or a mountain village. How odd.” Ning hefted his fishing pole.

“Sometimes, being by yourself is better,” the young man said.

Ning couldn't help but laugh. How intriguing.

He could tell that this youth was less than thirty years of age, but his eyes were as calm and as deep as the sea. He clearly had an extraordinary heart that was far more formidable than that of many Nascent Soul cultivators or even Apotheosis cultivators. This gave Ning a completely different way of viewing him.

"My name is Darknorth. I live just a few kilometers away from here. What's your name?" Ning smiled.

"My name is Green Bamboo," the youth said, continuing to use his wooden drill.

Chapter 4: Brightmoon Sword-Art, Blood Drop Sword-Intent

The young man continued to spin his wooden drill across that piece of wood, leaving behind one hole after another as bits of wooden detritus went flying about.

Ji Ning held his fish bucket in one hand and his fishing pole in the other. His gaze was focused on that spinning wooden drill, and he stared at it as though time itself had stood still for him.

“Eh?” The young man glanced at Ning in puzzlement. Was this simple tool of his really that interesting? Still, he didn’t say anything.

“The faster you rush, the slower you go?” As Ning stared at that wooden drill, a look of reflection was in his gaze. “Perhaps I should try something else.”

Sword-light began to shimmer within Ning’s eyes.

Ever since he had left the Brightshore Kingdom four thousand years ago and entered this alternate universe, he had experienced countless dangers. Skyfire Brightshore’s level of power had been increasing quite rapidly and noticeably, while Ning and the others were improving much more slowly! Ever since Ning had gained insight into his Yin-Yang Sword Domain, he had been meditating on his other four stances. Alas, he hadn’t been able to make a fundamental breakthrough.

Rumble. Rumble. The wooden drill continued to bore holes into that piece of wood.

“He’s nothing more than an ordinary mortal. If he wanted to use a knife to cut a hole in that piece of wood, he wouldn’t be able to do it! But by using the wooden drill in such a fashion, he’s able to easily drill straight through it...” Thousands on thousands of scenes suddenly flashed through Ning’s mind.

In his past life on Earth, there were some ordinary mortals who used electric power drills to drill holes in walls. To ordinary mortals, concrete

was incredible hard and tough... and yet, a power drill was able to easily pierce through it.

Ning thought back to the time he had spent wandering the Three Realms, where he had seen ordinary mortals battling in close combat, using their fists to punch out like Flood Dragons suddenly bursting forth from the waves... or perhaps cultivators who used the spear...

“I always thought... that the Blood Drop stance should be the fastest stance I have. If you want to be fast, you should take the shortest route and move as quickly as you can.” Sword-arts were flickering through Ning’s eyes. “Perhaps I was wrong.”

Ning continuously mentally mapped out one sword-art after another.

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When one reached Ning’s level of sword-arts, what one truly needed was inspiration. A single inspiration could allow his many years of accumulated insights to suddenly burst forth and be transformed! During his past life on Earth, there had been a scientist who saw an apple fall to the ground. As a result, he was suddenly inspired and came up with the law of universal gravitation. And yet, ordinary people might see the same thing happen a billion times without coming up with this idea. The reason why this scientist could was because he had a deep background and numerous past insights. All he needed was that spark of inspiration.

Ning needed a spark as well.

The reason he had been able to come up with his Yin-Yang Sword Domain was similarly because he had a moment of epiphany, allowing him to understand where his future direction lay.

Within the estate-world which Ning carried on him at all times.

Su Youji, World God Pillsaint, Elder God Wilddog, and the others were all present here, as were the World God servants who had been captured in the Bluegrace Sect.

“Master?” Su Youji had been meditating by the seashore, but she suddenly saw the white-robed Ji Ning appear off in the distance. This was

a divine power incarnation which Ning had created.

“Strike.” Ning stabbed outwards with his sword. Boom! Sword-light flashed and a few cracks could be seen.

“Again!” Ning stabbed out once more. This time, his sword-light actually became a spinning, draconic vortex. Roaaaar! The stabbing sound caused the space around him to tremble.

Slash!

Bang!

Boom!

Ning struck out repeatedly with his sword, using actual practice to verify the many ideas he had come up with.

In truth, there were many different paths to train in the sword, and every single path could theoretically lead to incredibly profound heights! In the past, although Ning had been able to see sword-arts which were similar to the ones he theorized about, he had never paid much attention to them. Those were sword-arts which belonged to others! Now, however, he had accumulated enough experience that he was able to naturally advance to this new level.

Only one's own sword-arts would allow one to have deeper levels of insights.

For one who trained in the sword, only those sword-arts you yourself created would allow you to reach the greatest heights of all.

“Why are Master's sword-art changing repeatedly? But these sword-arts are all so powerful.” Su Youji watched in a spellbound fashion. She was truly stunned.

“Whoah.”

“What terrifying sword-arts.”

Everyone on this island, including Elder God Wilddog and World God Pillsaint, were all drawn to and intrigued by the sight of Ning training with the sword. They all came over to watch, and all of them were stunned by

what they saw. These were all techniques which Ning had mentally visualized and theorized. Although he felt they were 'failures', every single one of these sword-arts was enough to allow a cultivator to become a truly, freakishly powerful Daolord. Most likely, if you used one of those sword-arts to become a Daolord you would instantly be a match for peak Daolords of the Second Step.

However... this wasn't what Ning wanted!

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Ning completely ignored him, absorbed in his own sword-arts.

One sword stabbed out after another. Slowly, his sword-arts became to transform, becoming very silent. Only in the final instant would they roar forth with an explosion.

BOOM!

When the sword-light stabbed out, there was no sound. Only when it came to a halt did it release that odd explosion.

BOOM!

BOOM!

Those strange explosions were growing louder and louder. They started to sound like thunder, and anyone within tens of thousands of kilometers would probably be able to hear them.

Ning struck out once again. This stab was as silent as the others, but in that final instant, there was just an extremely odd and extremely soft sound. The sound was incredibly soft and subdued, but it filled the hearts of everyone present with terror.

Boom. Such a tiny sound. When Ning's sword stabbed forwards, a pitch-black hole suddenly appeared in the space in front of him.

Swish.

Ning stepped forwards, walking into that pitch-black hole.

Within that hole, there was a gleaming, rainbow-like tunnel. Ning could

sense that this tunnel was leading him to many other places.

“A spatial passageway?” Ning advanced forwards through the spatial passageway.

“Come out.” Ning stabbed out with his sword, and another hole suddenly appeared in the rainbow light next to him. Ning stepped into this new hole.

When Ning emerged, he realized that he was now in a desert.

“It seems as though I went around the estate-world quite a few times in the blink of an eye,” Ning chuckled. “I didn’t expect that I would be able to use the Dao of the Sword to break through the bonds of space and enter a different spatial dimension.”

Space was divided up into many different dimensions. Prince Greatjoy had reached an extremely high level of skill in the Dao of Spacetime, which was why he could bring Ning and the others along with him when teleporting through spacetime. This sort of escaping ability was incredibly formidable! Ning himself was at most able to engage in spatial teleportation, which was nothing more than teleporting to a different place within the same spatial dimension. His sword, however, was able to shatter through the spatial laws of a small area around it, allowing one to pass through into a different spatial dimension.

In other words, through his Dao of the Sword Ning was now able to damage the Dao of Space and force his way into a different spatial dimension.

“According to the legends... any Dao, when trained to the ultimate apex, allows for mastery over all things,” Ning murmured softly. “At this point in time, my Dao of the Sword has reached a level where I can enter a different spatial dimension.”

“This stance... has finally been completed.” Ning smiled.

This sword-stance allowed him to forcibly destroy the Dao of Space in a localized region. Being able to enter a different dimension? That was nothing more than a side effect. In the end, the power of this stance was

what truly mattered!

“I really have to thank that ‘Green Bamboo’ kid.” Ning revealed a smile. “I just changed my way of thinking slightly and was able to finally finish my path.”

Swish! Ning stood there in the desert, sending out yet another stabbing strike. In the instant in which his stab came to a halt, the sword-light around Ning’s sword twisted just slightly. This twisting represented the true, marvelous nature of the new Blood Drop stance! The reason why a wooden drill was able to drill through a wooden board was because it had to pass through the resistance of the wood.

Actually, it had to pass through the resistance of the air itself. Even in the emptiness of the space, there were forms of energy that would pose a degree of resistance, and even in true emptiness of the void, there would be the ripples of energy that came from the various prime essences of the universe, such as the prime essence of the sword, the prime essence of metal, the prime essence of wood, or the prime essence of space.

Every single place was filled with traces of the Dao. All of them served as barriers or forms of resistance that laid countless invisible strands around you. So long as any trace of the Dao existed in a place, Ning’s sword would have to go through those layers of resistance. There was no way it could ever reach an infinitely fast speed! Thus, Ning’s current stance was a stance of destruction, of piercing through anything which sought to bar his path!

His sword was like that wooden drill which forcibly drilled through that wooden board.

In fact, Ning’s stance even had the effect of destroying the Dao itself! It was capable of destroying the Dao of Space, allowing him to enter a separate spatial dimension.

“When my sword strikes out, nothing can bar its path. After I am able to strengthen it so that nothing can stop it, not the Five Elements, Yin and Yang, or even spacetime... then that is when this stance of mine should be comparable to the strongest stance which Emperor Mirrorsnow left

behind.” Ning still remembered the image of his master, Emperor Mirrorsnow, displaying the most powerful stance of the [Heartseal] sword-art. That, too, was a strike that completely surpassed the limits of space and time.

Emperor Mirrorsnow had relied on that stance to gain eternity!

“The faster you rush, the slower you go. In the past, all I wanted to do was strike faster and faster... but that isn’t real speed.” Many thoughts flickered through Ning’s mind. “Many cultivators and many mortals try to seize every moment of every day, but they still end up failing.”

“Sometimes, if you slow down and catch your breath, then explode with full power, you might be more successful. The Dao can be found in life itself. It can be found in all things.” Ning smiled.

In comprehending the Dao, one had to fully understand life in all its myriad forms, to understand the essence of all things. If you did so, then when the moment came you would be able to see through to the true nature of things.

This sword-stance Ning had created destroyed all other Daos that barred its path. It seemed slow, but in reality it was now faster than ever before.

“My Blood Drop stance is the fastest of all swords, a sword of destruction, a sword that annihilates all other Daos. It is a stance that seeks to raise the sword to the ultimate level.” Ning nodded slowly. “Now, of the five stances of [Brightmoon], my Yin-Yang sword-intent and my Blood Drop sword-intent have taken form.”

Chapter 5: Ji Ning's Second Disciple

Within the mountainous forest. That gray-templed youth continued to work on his simple tools, while Ji Ning continued to stare at him while holding his fish bucket in one hand and his fishing rod in the other.

“How odd. He looks like a youth, but he speaks in such a grandiose manner. I’m just here working on some furniture for myself, and he’s been staring at me for more than an hour,” the young man muttered to himself. “Still... from the looks of him, he probably isn’t an ordinary mortal. How could an ordinary mortal youth be fishing by himself in the deep mountains? His demeanor seems quite extraordinary as well.”

Ning just continued to stare, and the young man didn’t say anything about it.

Suddenly, Ning let out a laugh as the sword-light in his eyes completely faded away. In truth, no ordinary mortal would even be able to see the sword-light generated from the visualizations he had just performed.

“I just came here out of curiosity on my way home from fishing... who would’ve thought that I would’ve mastered yet another stance of [Brightmoon] as a result?” Ning laughed and shook his head, his gaze still focused on the young man. “Although he doesn’t realize it... that drilling he did earlier helped inspire me to master this stance. I have to repay him for that.”

Ning had already taken a liking to the man due to his extraordinary heart. Now that the young man had also helped him comprehend the Dao, Ning decided to bless him with some transformative luck.

“First, I’ll take a look at his history and see what he experienced. Only then will I know what he truly needs.” Ning’s gaze rested on the young man’s figure as he began to visualize all of the young man’s past experiences.

Although he wanted to thank and reward this young mortal, he had to first know what the man wanted.

After seeing the man's history, Ning couldn't help but shake his head. This young man's true name was Yang Quding, and he came from an excellent family background. His mother had died when he was young, resulting in his father doting on him. Ever since he was young, he had been covered in brocade cloth and jade treasures. He was the son of a rich merchant, after all. He was born with great cleverness, and his father had once wanted to come up with a way for him to become an Immortal cultivator. Alas, Yang Quding didn't have a so-called 'spiritual root'. Ning, however, knew that the so-called 'spiritual root' was actually linked to one's affinity for the natural energy of Heaven and Earth.

The greater an affinity you had for that natural energy, the easier it would be for you to absorb it. Ever since Ning was young, for example, he always had a close affinity for water. But of course, after he trained in the [Ninehorn Lightning Serpent] his body gained a high affinity towards lightning. Alas, Yang Quding had absolutely terrible elemental affinity.

If you were only able to absorb 1% of how much others could absorb, it would naturally be far more difficult for you to engage in cultivation. Even worse, this continent possessed very sparse elemental energy to begin with, making cultivation difficult for all. For someone in a place like this to absorb elemental energy at such a ridiculously low rate... the chances of becoming a successful cultivator were incredibly poor.

For the sake of allowing his son to become an Immortal cultivator, Yang Quding's father had paid an enormous price. In the end, he had perished while escorting a shipment of valuables. This had been a tremendous blow to Yang Quding. After failing to become an Immortal cultivator, Yang Quding focused all of his efforts on continuing his father's legacy as a merchant. He was quite clever and capable, and in just a few short years he had become a huge tycoon. In fact, he even employed two Foundation cultivators as well as several weaker Qi Condensation cultivators. He eventually married a woman as well.

But then... one day, a young, evil man entered the city which Yang Quding was in. He took a fancy to Yang Quding's wife, and desired to kidnap her and make her his concubine. However, Yang Quding wasn't an

easy person to deal with; he had Foundation cultivators by his side, and he was able to bring a stop to this!

The problem was that this evil man had an extraordinary background. When Yang Quding looked into this man's background, he immediately befriended a Core Formation elder of a major sect, giving him many precious treasures and eventually becoming that Core Formation elder's adopted son. But of course, this was only in name! What really mattered was that with this protector of a 'father', his opponent wouldn't dare to be too rash.

Alas, that evil man played some tricks in secret, forcing Yang Quding's wife's family to bow their heads before him. In the end, even Yang Quding's wife had chosen to follow the evil man and leave him.

His parents had died long ago. Yang Quding had no family of his own, and so his love for his wife was deep and intense. And yet... his wife had actually betrayed him and left to follow another man. When she left, she had said, "Quding, you are able to protect me, but can you protect my mother and father? Don't blame me."

He had suffered a severe mental blow, but he had no desire to take revenge. Instead, he had just sat there dully every day. Eventually, he dispersed his family's savings and entered this mountainous forest, giving himself the name 'Green Bamboo'.

"Now, let me take a look at his future." Ning's gaze was still affixed upon Yang Quding's figure. Yang Quding's future was a bit cloudy; as soon as he had met Ning, it was guaranteed that his destiny would change. Ning was strong enough to annihilate this entire continent with ease, after all!

If Ning chose not to interfere with his life...

Yang Quding would stay by himself within this mountain forest for more than sixty years. After sixty-plus years, he would encounter a Nascent Soul cultivator of the Nirvana Sect. The two would chat together, resulting in the Nascent Soul cultivator feeling tremendous admiration towards Yang Quding. The Nascent Soul cultivator would pay an enormous price to help him to become an Immortal cultivator. Alas, due to his great age and his

poor spiritual root, he was still only able to become a Foundation cultivator.

However, he had reached an extremely high level of enlightenment. As a Foundation cultivator, he was capable of slaying Core Formation Daoists. He was also a good man with a virtuous reputation, and he was incredibly skilled in the 'Illusions of Nirvana', a skill which allowed him to trap foes in myriad illusions which would cause them to feel regret, then repent and change their ways. He even ended up slaying that vile man who had taken his wife from him. Although he was merely a Foundation cultivator, he was respectfully addressed as 'Daoist Green Bamboo' by others. In the end, due to his allotted time being used up, he passed away peacefully.

"His heart has already reached such a profound level that he is even more formidable than Nascent Soul cultivators and Apotheosis cultivators in this regard. After he becomes an Immortal cultivator... that 'Illusions of Nirvana' technique is a classic example of something which major powers who belong to the Buddhist paths would use." Ning nodded slowly. "Given his heart, he truly is well-suited to become an Immortal cultivator."

"Go!"

Two streaks of sword-light suddenly shot out from Ning's eyes, and they landed upon the body of the furniture-making man.

The sword-light quickly covered his entire body, rapidly transforming and overhauling it. The young man's body quickly began to completely transform, with his muscles and tendons reaching a level of perfection in strength. His physical strength alone was stronger than even Xiantian-level Fiendgods of the Three Realms.

With a body like this... it could be said that Yang Quding's spiritual result was unquestionably number one in this entire continent.

Whoosh. Ning waved a finger, tapping Yang Quding on the forehead. A surge of divine will surged outwards and was transmitted straight into his sea of consciousness.

Yang Quding was just an ordinary mortal, after all. Even though his body had been completely transformed, he still couldn't withstand the power of

the memories which Ning wished to give him. Thus, Ning could only choose to leave a stream of his own divine will within Yang Quding's mind, much like how Emperor Mirrorsnow had left some of his own divine will behind. However, the reason why Emperor Mirrorsnow had done this was because he had left long ago and wished to be able to pass something onto his disciples. Ning had done this because his disciple was too weak and wouldn't be able to endure a 'normal' transmission.

"Right now, you are too weak. You are only able to endure me passing unto you sword-arts and techniques which are at the Empyrean God or Celestial Immortal level," Ning mused to himself. That stream of divine will contained complete cultivation systems, including both of Ning's proudest accomplishments, the 'Yin-Yang' sword-art and the 'Blood Drop' sword-art. These were Ning's most impressive techniques to date.

As the young man grew stronger, he would naturally gain more and more information from this legacy. When his soul became sufficiently powerful, he would finally be able to endure and receive it all.

"You are the first person I've truly transmitted my sword-arts unto." Ning laughed.

Ning's first disciple was Bluecliff Xiaoyu, but that was because of the rules of Mount Innerheart. Ning had to choose a person of great karmic virtue as his disciple! His Primaltwin stood guard over the Three Realms and would often provide Bluecliff Xiaoyu with some advice, but alas she simply wasn't that talented.

'Green Bamboo', also known as Yang Quding, was Ning's second disciple.

Ning only left behind a cultivation method and his sword-arts! As for divine abilities and what not, he didn't leave any of those. Emperor Mirrorsnow had left behind four Daolord-level golems, but Ning didn't leave a single protective measure behind at all. This was because these fairly weaker protective measures wouldn't really be that useful. Given Green Bamboo's talent, it wouldn't be hard for him to rise to prominence in this Mortal Realm. As for those excessively powerful protective

measures? They might actually result in some unnecessary trouble.

Guiding and nurturing a mortal was completely different from guiding and nurturing a World-level cultivator.

Emperor Mirrorsnow required his potential disciples to be World-level cultivators who had passed multiple trials. Yang Quding, however, was still just an ordinary mortal.

“W-what did I just...” Yang Quding felt as though he had just awoken from a dream.

When he came to his senses, he saw a youth carrying a fishing bucket and a fishing rod walk far off into the distance. “Disciple, if fate wills it the two of us shall meet again, ahahah...”

And just like that, Ning vanished into thin air.

“Disciple?”

Yang Quding was stunned. Moments later, a large amount of information flooded into his mind.

There were detailed instructions on how to go from being an ordinary mortal to a Celestial Immortal or Empyrean God. There were also two inconceivably powerful sword-arts known as the [Yin-Yang] sword-arts and the [Blood Drop] sword-arts. Only part of the information was available to him for now. When his soul grew stronger, he’d naturally be able to gain even more of this legacy. Ning had set down restrictive spells on his memories, preventing him from teaching these things to any others.

“B-b-but...” Yang Quding was stunned. He wasn’t someone who knew nothing of cultivation at all. He knew what the major impediments to Immortal cultivation were, but today he had just gained techniques which would actually lead him past tribulation and reach the legendary level of Celestial Immortals and Empyrean Gods? And this was just a portion of the true technique? And those infinitely powerful sword-arts!

Yang Quding instantly understood that from this day forth, his life would be changed.

If a major power was to scry his destiny, he would discover that this man's life had been completely changed. His future would actually become extremely fuzzy, and the farther one gazed the more difficult it would be to divine.

"Master." Yang Quding immediately knelt down and kowtowed towards the direction in which Ning left. He remembered that Ning had addressed himself as Darknorth.

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"He's in an alternate universe, while I must return to the Endless Territories. I wonder if we'll ever meet again," Ning mused. He had been seized by the sudden impulse to teach a disciple. He... really was an absolutely irresponsible 'master'.

"Brother Darknorth."

"Darknorth." Prince Greatjoy, Heartlord Solewind, Waterlord Firesurge, and Skyfire Brightshore were seated next to each other, drinking some wine.

"I just caught a big fish." Ning grinned as he lifted up his fish bucket.

Chapter 6: Sacred Immortal Realm

Ji Ning, Prince Greatjoy, Solewind, and the others lived a life of leisure here at Wintermount. Although they were ten billion kilometers away, their gazes were still often turned towards what was happening at the spacetime transfer array.

“This disciple of mine actually has some talent for the sword after all.” Ning paid quite a bit of attention to his disciple. Although Yang Quding lived on Wintermount as well, nobody here was able to detect Ning’s presence unless he wished it.

“Brother Darknorth, this kid’s sword-arts seem quite similar to your own Yin-Yang Sword Domain.” Prince Greatjoy sat nearby, watching as Yang Quding trained in swordplay ten kilometers away. “He trains by himself within the deep mountains, neither impatient nor hasty, and his heart is as calm as water. I have to say, his heart is quite impressive.”

“He can be considered my disciple,” Ning said with a laugh.

“Disciple?” Prince Greatjoy was shocked. “You accepted an ordinary mortal as a disciple?”

Although he had a good impression of Yang Quding, the man was still nothing more than an ordinary mortal. The five of them were amongst the most truly, freakishly talented figures of the entire Endless Territories. Even Skyfire Brightshore, who was currently still the weakest of the five, was a dazzling genius of the Brightshore Imperials. As for the other four, they all wielded their own Supreme Daos.

Any of them could break through into the Daolord level at any moment, and they would be extraordinary ones at that. Given Ning’s status... if he wanted to choose a disciple, virtually all World-level cultivators would be crying and begging for a chance to be chosen. And yet, he instead chose an ordinary mortal as his disciple?

“Your disciple?” The nearby Solewind laughed. “We’re just passing through this place. Why’d you accept a disciple? And is this how you treat your disciples? You just completely ignore them?”

“Even if I wanted to mentor him, I wouldn’t be able to do so for long. Better to just let him grow naturally.” Ning took a slow sip of wine.

“Brother Darknorth certainly takes it easy,” Waterlord Firesurge said.

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In the blink of an eye, more than sixty-one years went past. The spacetime transfer array was almost ready once more.

“Time to leave.” Greatjoy rose to his feet.

“Time to head out, Darknorth. Stop staring at your disciple,” Solewind teased.

Ning had just glanced off into the distance. His second disciple, ‘Green Bamboo’ Yang Quding, had long ago departed from Wintermount and was out adventuring through the world. He was already quite famous for millions of kilometers around, and was venerated as ‘Sword Immortal Green Bamboo’.

“Time to go.” Ning nodded.

Once he left, the two of them truly would have parted from each other. Once Ning returned to the Endless Territories, the two would be located within two separate universes. It truly was hard to say if they would ever meet again. It would all be up to fate.

Although the core of the spacetime transfer array was quite large, it was still completely packed with hundreds of millions of Nascent Soul cultivators and Apotheosis cultivators who had gathered here throughout this utterly massive continent.

“Fellow Daoists, the ancient transfer array shall only be activated once every hundred years.” A middle-ranked Apotheosis cultivator was standing in midair and speaking in a sonorous voice. “Our Mortal Realm is unfathomably vast and filled with countless cultivators. Thus, I would like to invite all fellow Daoists interested in going to the Sacred Immortal Realm to first enter this estate-world! This estate-world is a very simple and crude one which is quite weak; any Apotheosis cultivator can easily tear it apart from within. All of us will enter this estate-world, and then

the ancient transfer array will teleport it to the other side. This will be much easier.”

“Agreed.”

“Makes sense.”

“This has been the standard method for many years.”

Countless Nascent Soul cultivators and Apotheosis cultivators nodded in agreement. This was a custom that had been established many years ago. Otherwise, how was the array supposed to be able to accommodate hundreds of millions of cultivators? The estate-treasure before them was quite crude and simple. They were able to see through it to know what was going on outside, and were also able to tear through it at a moment’s notice.

As for Ning’s group of five, they were mixed into the enormous group of cultivators. No one paid them any heed.

“Fellow Daoists, let us go inside together.” The tall middle-aged man in midair was the first to fly towards the entrance of the estate-world which was placed at the very center of the ancient transfer array.

This estate-world was shaped like an actual Immortal estate, and it had a normal ‘gate’.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!

Countless streaks of light flew towards the entrance as well.

“Let’s go.” Ning’s group of five followed the crowd into the estate as well.

“It really is weak.” The five found a corner within the estate-world, and no other cultivators were able to notice their presence. Ning laughed as he sent mentally, “I feel like the slightest vibration would be enough to cause it to completely collapse.”

“Let me stabilize it a bit. I actually am worried about it splintering,” Solewind said.

Rumble...

A cultivator on the outside had just activated the spacetime transfer array. Because it had already stored up enough energy, it now was able to completely activate.

The hundreds of millions of Nascent Soul cultivators and Apotheosis cultivators gathered inside were all incredibly excited.

“The Sacred Immortal Realm!”

“We’re finally going to arrive at the Sacred Immortal Realm.”

“All the elders of my school are in the Sacred Immortal Realm. According to the legends, there are far more cultivators in the Sacred Immortal Realm than there are in our world.” They were all incredibly excited by this. Ever since they had embarked upon the path of cultivation, they had dreamed of one day reaching the apex of power in the Mortal Realm and then heading to the Sacred Immortal Realm.

Those qualified to head into the Sacred Immortal Realm were all major figures of the Mortal Realm.

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A short while later, the teleportation effect came to an end. The estate-world had been sent to the Sacred Immortal Realm.

Ji Ning’s group had been relaxing in their little corner. Now, all of their faces tightened.

“Something’s wrong.” Prince Greatjoy sent mentally, “Everyone, let us hide ourselves for now and watch what happens.”

“Right.” Ning and the others all nodded.

This feeble estate-world had virtually no impact on them at all. They were able to see through it to the outside world and knew what was happening outside.

“We’ve arrived.”

“We’ve arrived at the Sacred Immortal Realm.” The hundreds of millions of Nascent Soul cultivators and Apotheosis cultivators were all incredibly excited.

Rumble...

The shoddily-made estate-treasure blew apart with a boom.

The countless Nascent Soul cultivators and Apotheosis cultivators all suddenly appeared in midair, covering the skies and blocking out the sun like a horde of locusts.

“Such dense elemental energy!”

“The elemental energy here is far denser than it is in our Mortal Realm.”

“So this is the Sacred Immortal Realm?” The countless cultivators all stared excitedly... but suddenly, they saw a large number of stone pillars off in the distance. The stone pillars all had cultivators bound to them. Some were humanoid, some were monsters, and some were beasts. Although they looked different, all of them were covered with blood, wounds, and scars. Many of them had eyes filled with furious hatred.

Deathly silence.

The hundreds of millions of Nascent Soul cultivators and Apotheosis cultivators who had just arrived were all deathly silent.

Those cultivators bound to the stone pillars had clearly suffered countless types of torture. What was going on?

“Another batch has arrived.” One of the many bound and tormented cultivators let out a low mutter.

“One batch after another. There’s never an end.”

“Who can send a message to the people of the Mortal Realm? Tell them not to come to this ‘Sacred Immortal Realm’. Do not come!”

“I truly shouldn’t have come here.”

“I regret it so much.”

“Don’t come to the Sacred Immortal Realm.” The countless bound cultivators all mumbled and moaned in broken, pained voices.

As for the hundreds of millions of Nascent Soul cultivators and Apotheosis cultivators who had just arrived, they all knew that something

was wrong. Their hearts were as cold as ice.

“Ahahaha!” Suddenly, the vast land began to tremble as a deep laugh rang out from the depths of the earth. Slowly, one mountain-like figure after another began to emerge from underground. There was over a hundred of these figures, and each one was thirty thousand meters tall. An aura of darkness spread out to cover the skies as they stared at the countless cultivators with their blood-red eyes.

A hundred towering figures, and every single one of them possessed an aura that caused the cultivators to quiver in terror.

“Where are we?!” A golden-robed man amidst the crowd tamped down his horror enough to say, “This isn’t the Sacred Immortal Rea-”

“This is the Sacred Immortal Realm.” One of the towering forms spoke out in a thundering voice that shook Heaven and Earth. As he waved his hand, he caused an enormous cloth sack to appear.

Whoooooosh.

The cloth sack gave birth to an utterly, incredibly powerful sucking force. The hundreds of millions of Nascent Soul cultivators and Apotheosis cultivators tried to resist, but they were still forcibly sucked into the cloth sack. After all the cultivators were sucked away, the cloth sack shrank in size and flew back into the towering figure’s hands.

“A few more toys.” The towering figure looked at the cloth sack, then let out a low laugh. “Master shall be excited by this! I will go deliver him his toys. As for the rest of you, stay here and deal with the disobedient ones.”

“Alright.” The other towering figures all nodded.

Whoosh.

The bag-holding figure quickly flew off into the distance.

Ning’s group of five was standing there in midair. Given Prince Greatjoy’s mastery over spacetime, the towering figures were completely unable to see them.

Ning’s group just watched silently as this all happened.

“A hundred Elder God-level golems.” Ning narrowed his eyes as he sent mentally, “And they spoke of a ‘master’. His master is most likely a Daolord.”

“Agreed. This ‘Sacred Immortal Realm’ most likely has a Daolord standing behind it.” Solewind had a solemn look on his face as well.

“This will be trouble. Let’s be careful as we investigate this matter,” Prince Greatjoy said somberly.

“Agreed.”

“Let’s go.”

The five of them left the area silently.

Chapter 7: The Enormous Prison

Ji Ning and the others didn't dare to cause the slightest disturbance, for fear of drawing the attention of the 'Daolord' they suspected of being behind this Sacred Immortal Realm. Right now, they had the advantage of stealth. Once they were discovered, things would become difficult. This Sacred Immortal Realm was someone else's territory, after all. There had to be many formations protecting it.

For example, that local branch of the Bluegrass Sect in the Brightshore Kingdom was only staffed with weak World-level cultivators, but they were still able to trap Ning thanks to the grand protective formation! A Daolord's lair was an incredibly dangerous place. There was no such thing as being too careful.

But of course, Ning's group was fairly confident. Generally speaking, they wouldn't be worried about weaker Daolords at all.

Swoosh.

Ning's group of five silently teleported through space to move to the margins of this great continent, the Sacred Immortal Realm. Given Prince Greatjoy's mastery over spacetime, a spatial teleportation caused no spatial ripples at all.

"Eh?" Ning's group stood next to some boulders at the rather ragged edges of this continent. When they looked at the chaotic space up in front of them, they saw countless streaks of golden runes flickering and flashing. An enormous, ethereal formation was covering this entire continent.

"What a powerful formation," Heartlord Solewind said softly. "This formation is so profound that even I find it difficult to fathom. There's no way an ordinary Daolord was capable of creating it. I wonder if this formation was purchased by this Daolord or if he created it himself."

"Hopefully, he bought it." Prince Greatjoy looked as solemn as the others had ever seen him.

Ning nodded as well.

Anyone capable of developing this formation was a Daolord of the Third Step, at the very least. In fact, it might even be a Verge-level Daolord of the Fourth Step! Given this Daolord also had the advantage of being on familiar terrain... they were going to be in serious trouble.

“Then how should we leave this place?” Waterlord Firesurge asked, “You all saw that spatial transfer array. It’ll only allow us to return to the Mortal Realm! Once we activate it to go back to the Mortal Realm, that Daolord will definitely find out and might chase us all the way back. We’ll have nowhere to run.”

“Return to the Mortal Realm through the formation?” Prince Greatjoy shook his head. “Those golems would probably notice as soon as we did anything, which means their master would know as well. Given how powerful Daolords are, this one would probably be able to send his will to span the entire Sacred Immortal Realm in an instant! He would be able to disrupt the transference process. We probably won’t have any chance of going back to the Mortal Realm.”

Ning, Solewind, Skyfire, and Firesurge all had heavy looks on their faces.

A Daolord definitely was an opponent who could prove to be a huge threat to them.

“We’re not going to be able to defeat this formation.” Solewind raised his head to glance at the great formation covering the entire Sacred Immortal Realm. “Even if we go back to the Mortal Realm, it won’t be of any use. Once we go back, we won’t be able to escape.”

“Let’s keep looking,” Ning advised. “Perhaps we might find something useful.”

“No other options.”

.....

The five of them began to stealthily search the entire Sacred Immortal Realm.

The Sacred Immortal Realm was much smaller than the Mortal Realm, covering just a few tens of billions of kilometers! The entire continent was covered by this enormous formation, and in the very center of the continent there was a dim, faint green mist. Deep within that mist, there was a towering estate that could vaguely be seen. This was the only place in the entire continent which Ning's group did not dare to enter.

It was highly likely that this estate was the place where the Daolord lived!

"What a terrifying aura of resentment and hatred."

Ning's group was standing atop a barren, black land as they stared towards the enormous black edifice off in the distance.

Above that enormous black edifice was an aura of hatred which was so strong that it had actually become corporeal. Some of the hatred was tinged with red light, while others glowed with a black aura. However, the hatred located at the highest parts of the edifice were transformed into a deep green color, a deep green which was formed as a result of the condensed hatred of countless cultivators over the course of countless years. Every so often, furious faces could be seen appearing within the aura of hatred.

"Even if I destroyed a hundred chaosworld, the hatred and resentment wouldn't be as strong as it is here." Greatjoy frowned.

"I can sense that there are countless cultivators imprisoned within. This aura of hatred should be generated by them," Solewind said. "The reason why it is so dense is possibly because these cultivators are suffering unspeakable torments. We saw early on how many cultivators were lashed to those stone pillars."

"Let's go inside," Skyfire Brightshore urged.

"Let's go."

They needed more information. None of them dared to be arrogant in dealing with the Daolord that might be living in seclusion within this continent.

The enormous black edifice was a jail of utterly titanic proportions, and countless cultivators were imprisoned within it. It must be understood that the Mortal Realm's formation would activate once every century. It was only natural that many cultivators had been imprisoned here.

"This place..." Waterlord Firesurge's face paled as he continued to walk forwards. "This place is even more terrifying than the terrible Nightmare Lands which the legends of my homeland spoke of."

"And more terrifying than the Eighteen Hells of my own homeland." Ning was equally somber.

This enormous prison was filled with various implements of torture and punishment. This entire prison was in reality designed strictly for the torture of cultivators. It must be understood that the Eighteen Hells of the Three Realms were designed to punish great sinners, but this place had only one purpose... to torture and torment as much as possible. This made it a thousand times as frightening, causing even the faces of these five to turn pale.

"AHHH! All of you will die one day! You demons! You devils! All of you will DIE!"

"Nooooo..."

"Spare me! Spare me! Spare me!"

"No begging. Begging is pointless."

All sorts of voices could be heard. Some were filled with hatred, some rambled, some were frenzied, some were screaming.

The entire prison was being used to furiously torment all of the hundreds of millions of newly imprisoned Nascent Soul and Apotheosis cultivators. Some of the new abductees were still begging for mercy, but they soon realized that this was completely pointless.

Whoosh...

Ning's group of five continued their journey through the prison. Nobody was able to see them, not even the golems responsible for torturing the

prisoners.

Most of these golems were at least at the Elder God level. Some were at the True God level, and a few were even at the Empyrean God level. There had to be millions of golems within this prison.

“Who would’ve thought that the ‘Sacred Immortal Realm’ so many dreamed of was actually a hell such as this?” Ning murmured softly.

“Indeed. However, there are very few Elder God-level golems. Most are weaker... perhaps the Daolord of this land is fairly weak as well,” Solewind said.

“Hopefully.” A murderous look was in Greatjoy’s eyes.

If the Daolord was a weak one, the five of them would join forces to kill him! That would end all their worries at one go.

Whoosh.

Although there were restrictive formations scattered throughout the prison, they were meant for weaker cultivators and were completely ineffective against Ning’s group. Ning’s group was able to easily enter one of the jail cells.

This jail cell held over a hundred cultivators, all shackled in chains. One of them was a skinny old man who was seated silently in the lotus position, a terrifying look in his eyes.

“I can’t accept this. I can’t accept this!” The skinny old man growled mentally, “I have to ascend and escape. If I can escape, in the future I’ll come back and kill these devils.” To this very day, he had yet to realize that his tormentors were actually golems.

“Eh?” The skinny old man suddenly felt that something was off. Five figures had suddenly appeared before him.

“You-...” The old man was stunned. This was absolutely bizarre. These five figures were simply too clean and pristine, and none of them were wearing shackles. What’s more... the doors to the prison hadn’t even opened.

“I have some questions for you,” the skinny, bald, red-robed youth said.

“Yes,” the skinny old man said obediently. He felt a sense of absolute devotion to the man before him. If the man ordered him to commit suicide, he wouldn’t hesitate in the slightest.

As for other manacled cultivators in the jail cell, they weren’t able to see a thing.

.....

As Ning’s group infiltrated the enormous prison, a figure suddenly flew out of an ancient, towering estate which was surrounded by faint green mist that was located in the very core of the Sacred Immortal Realm. This figure was dressed in light green robes, had a stooped form, and just a few green scales on his forehead. His eyes looked quite cold and insidious, and his ancient face was covered in wrinkles.

“Master.” An Elder God golem standing outside the estate, waiting respectfully.

“Mm.” The stooped old man nodded. “The new batch of cultivators have arrived?”

“Yes, they just arrived. We’ve already sent them all into the prison,” the Elder God golem said respectfully. Golems were a type of magic treasures, but when they gained sentience they would be just as intelligent as actually living beings. The difference was, they would be unswervingly loyal and would do whatever their master ordered them to do.

“Mm. Let’s go take a look.” The stooped figure nodded slowly. The Elder God golem followed behind him respectfully, and the two quickly flew into the skies. In the blink of an eye, they moved more than ten billion kilometers and arrived at the enormous prison, wreathed in an aura of baleful energy.

Chapter 8: The Hope of the Cultivators

The enormous prison was divided into many different regions. Within a jail cell located in one particular corner of the prison, Ji Ning's group of five was staring at that skinny, elderly prisoner.

"I was captured and brought to this place six hundred years ago, after I travelled through the spacetime transfer array and arrived at the Sacred Immortal Realm." The skinny old man's eyes were filled with a reminiscent look as he said softly, "Ever since then, I've been imprisoned here. I've suffered countless torments. Some cultivators chose to self-detonate because they were unable to endure the misery. Ugh... I really wish I could go back to the Mortal Realm."

Ning's group all frowned. Solewind asked, "Do you know nothing about the rest of this Sacred Immortal Realm?"

The skinny old man shook his head. "I know very little. We've been trapped here this entire time."

"Do you know about the 'master' which these devils who torture you serve?" Solewind asked.

The skinny man trembled as a look of terror appeared in his eyes. "He... he's the master of the devils. He's terrifying. Absolutely terrifying. After I was imprisoned here, I saw him visit the prison on two separate occasions. He used a terrifying spell to personally torture us. Countless cultivators were simultaneously tortured at the same time. He was simply too powerful, too terrifying."

"Twice? He visited the prison twice in the past six hundred years?" Solewind's face tightened slightly.

"He comes quite frequently," Prince Greatjoy growled.

"We have to be careful. Who knows when this Daolord will appear again?" Ning said solemnly. He didn't dare to spread out his own godsense, as once he did that it would be very easy for their foe to detect them.

Prince Greatjoy suddenly frowned. "I ask you this. The ancient transfer array activates once every century, which means that an utter flood of cultivators has been sent over here over the course of many years. If the torment never comes to an end... why are so many of you still alive? If you know that life will be worse than death, and that you will be subject to perpetual agony with no way of fighting back, why are you still enduring?"

Ning and the others were intrigued. Right. When faced with overwhelming power, overwhelming despair, and the prospect of never-ending torture, why wouldn't they choose to die? Logically speaking, most would rather commit suicide than to continue like this.

"Because we are going to get revenge," the skinny old man growled, his eyes filled with fury and hate.

"You? How?" Prince Greatjoy was puzzled.

"If we can ascend, we can leave this place." The skinny old man ground his teeth. "After ascending, I will become a Celestial Immortal and will be able to continue to cultivate. In the future, after I grow stronger, I'll definitely come back and get my revenge."

Heartlord Solewind asked, "Ascend? If you ascend, you'll be able to escape the Sacred Immortal Realm?"

Ning and the others were all puzzled. Logically speaking, 'ascension' should represent ascending into an estate-world of a Daolord.

"Those who ascend can indeed escape," the skinny old man said immediately. "Long, long ago, before our Mortal Realm even had that ancient transfer array, it was somewhat easier for cultivators to train to the late Apotheosis stage. In the Mortal Realm, there were some who were occasionally able to reach that stage, and once they did the Celestial Tribulation would soon descend upon them. After the tribulation, they would ascend to a land of Immortals.

"Later, cultivation in the Mortal Realm became more difficult. However, the ancient transfer array then appeared, and some of our ancient predecessors chose to travel through it and go to the Sacred Immortal Realm. Some of them even came back and then told their descendants and

juniors that the Sacred Immortal Realm was a holy place for cultivation with incredibly dense elemental energy. As a result, successive generations of cultivators have come to this place.

“Only after entering did we realize that it was all just a trick.” The skinny old man gritted his teeth.

Ning and the other four were all extraordinary figures. They immediately understood what had happened.

Long ago, before the ‘Mortal Realm’ was discovered by that Daolord, cultivation was a much simpler path. When the enormous protective formation sprang up to protect the continent from the spatial storms around it, it naturally caused the elemental energy in the continent to grow sparse, making cultivation much more difficult. The ancient transfer array then appeared, followed by some cultivators who were soul-compelled to return from this ‘Sacred Immortal Realm’ and widely spread rumors of how wonderful it was.

It was only natural that more and more cultivators would be drawn to enter it.

“It was all a plot. In truth, in the Mortal Realm it is still possible for outstandingly talented geniuses to reach the late-stage Apotheosis level, then successfully overcome their tribulations and ascend.” The skinny elder continued, “But it truly is very, very difficult. The Mortal Realm is unfathomably vast, but only a handful of people each century can achieve their goals and ascend. That is why we all entered this Sacred Immortal Realm.”

The skinny elder shook his head. “Although we are imprisoned here, it is still true that elemental energy in this world is far denser than it was in ours. It isn’t too hard to reach the late-stage of the Apotheosis level. However, once those devils notice us reaching that stage, they’ll immediately strike and kill us! Thus, we have to accumulate as much power as possible. We need to build up so much power that as soon as we reach the late-stage of the Apotheosis level, the Celestial Tribulation will immediately descend. By then, those devils won’t be able to do anything to

us.”

Ning and the others were quite curious.

“So as long as you cause a Celestial Tribulation, you’ll be out of danger?”

“Once the Celestial Tribulation comes, they would never dare to interfere! All they would do is stand off to one side and watch. Even if that devil lord came himself, he would just watch from afar. Anyone who succeeds in the tribulation would immediately ascend to the legendary Immortal Lands,” the skinny elder said.

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As Ning and the others questioned him, they continued to discuss this matter amongst themselves.

Generally speaking, in places like the Three Realms the so-called ‘Celestial Tribulation’ might pose a threat to ordinary cultivators, but it definitely wouldn’t be able to threaten a World-level cultivator! A World-level cultivator would be capable of annihilating the entire Three Realms; how could a mere tribulation be able to do anything to him? By the same principle, it was impossible for a Celestial Tribulation to threaten a Daolord! Even if a Celestial Tribulation did descend, a Daolord could forcibly intervene and completely destroy the tribulation.

“I have a possible answer,” Firesurge whispered. “Ever since we entered the Archaeus region, we’ve been hearing stories of ‘ascension’ from the continents that we visit. Do you think it’s possible that there’s a Daolord in every single continent? That they will all go so far as to spend time and effort setting up an estate-world to protect them?”

“What are you saying?” Solewind looked at him.

“I imagine you’ve all noticed this by now as well. After we entered the Archaeus region, we’ve been able to sense that its power permeates every inch of this region,” Firesurge said. “The only reason we aren’t crushed by it is because we bear Archaeus medallions.”

Ning and the others nodded. It was true that the power of the Archaeus region was omnipresent here.

“Then... it is entirely possible that the ‘Celestial Tribulation’ sent down upon the countless living creatures of the many continents here were all sent down by the Archaeus region itself,” Firesurge said.

“Right.”

“Right, that has to be it.”

Their eyes all instantly lit up as they came to understand this matter.

The Celestial Tribulation... it only came about as a result of the natural laws of Heaven and Earth.

In a chaosworld such as the Three Realms, the ‘laws’ in question were the laws of the chaoworld itself, and thus it was the chaosworld itself which sent down the Celestial Tribulations.

But here in the Archaeus region, those vast continents did not have any natural laws that belonged to the continents themselves. Logically speaking, there was no way for the continents themselves to send down Celestial Tribulations. Which meant... it had to be the entire Archaeus region which sent down the tribulations!

“Because the tribulations are sent by the Archaeus region itself, not even Daolords would dare to interfere. If they did, they would be punished by the power of the entire Archaeus region,” Firesurge said. The reason why someone like Ning would be able to destroy the Celestial Tribulation of the Three Realms was because he wasn’t afraid of any reprisal from the Three Realms. But a reprisal from the Archaeus region... even Eternal Emperors would fear such a thing.

The Archaeus region was the very core of this entire alternate universe! A strike from it would essentially represent a strike from the entire universe itself! Who would dare to withstand such a blow?

“It makes perfect sense.” Skyfire Brightshore nodded.

“There is a high probability that you are correct. I’d say the chances are at least 80%. But there’s another 20% probability as well... perhaps all this talk of ‘ascension’ is nothing more than a cruel lie meant to give these cultivators hope. Once they lose all hope, they probably won’t be able to

keep on living,” Solewind said.

Whoosh. Ning and the other four silently emerged from that small jail cell. They continued to walk through the enormous prison, with no one able to detect them.

“GREETINGS, MASTER!”

Suddenly, every inch of the prison exploded with raucous chants. Every single one of the million-plus golems obediently knelt down, and the sound of their knees hitting the ground echoed throughout the prison.

“He’s coming.”

“The lord of the devils is coming.”

“N-no...”

“He’s come again.”

When the prisoners trapped within those countless jail cells within the prison heard the noise, they instantly became filled with terror. Each time this ‘lord of the devils’ arrived, he would bring them nightmarish torment that was even worse than what the devils were able to dispense. Everyone’s breathing became ragged and chaotic, and even the aura of hatred, resentment, and madness which permeated the place became much stronger than before.

Ning’s face turned pale, as did that of the other four.

“Hmph.” A cold snort rang out, followed by an awe-inspiringly powerful surge of heartforce that swept out and covered the entire prison. At the same time, some faint green mist began to seep towards every single cell.

But suddenly, the green mist came to an immediate halt.

Even that wave of heartforce trembled.

“Who are the five of you?!” A furious and stunned mental query rang out.

Ning’s group of five was standing there in the hallways. They were able to easily ensure the golems were unable to detect them, but there was no

way for them to avoid the heartforce scan of a Daolord.

Chapter 9: Slaying a Daolord

Ji Ning and the other four felt a bit frantic. All this was happening too fast.

“Senior.” Heartlord Solewind sent mentally, “We came on the command of our master to enter the Archaeus region and test ourselves here. Alas, we accidentally entered the Mortal Realm, then rode the spacetime transfer array in preparing to depart from this place. We never imagined that the Sacred Immortal Realm was a place which we could not exit, and so we began to search for a way which would allow us to leave this place. We have no intentions of being your enemy, senior. I’d like to ask you to permit us to leave the Sacred Immortal Realm.”

“Oh? Five World-level cultivators and five Archaeus medallions... such wealth!” The stooped Daolord who stood at the entrance of the prison sent his voice out echoing with the ears of the five. “Letting you leave isn’t completely out of the question. However, you have to agree to one of my conditions.”

“Pray tell, senior,” Solewind immediately said.

Without actually fighting them, no one would be able to tell how strong Ning’s group was!

In the Archaeus region, there were some Daolords who would slay any World-level cultivators they saw and steal their Archaeus medallions. However, the majority of Daolords were unwilling to lower themselves and rob juniors, nor were they willing to offend the sect standing behind those World-level cultivators. Generally speaking, World-level cultivators within the Archaeus region all had significant backgrounds.

“I need you to swear a lifeblood oath that once you leave this place, you will never let anyone else learn a single thing about what you experienced in the Mortal Realm and the Sacred Immortal Realm. If you accept, I’ll let you leave this place,” the stooped Daolord said.

“A lifeblood oath?” Solewind immediately smiled. “That’s simple.”

“Careful!”

The nearby Prince Greatjoy’s face tightened as light suddenly shot out of his eyes.

Moments later, the faces of Solewind, Ji Ning, Skyfire Brightshore, and Firesurge all changed. They, too, could sense a terrifying strong surge of power descend from the heavens towards the prison. For this surge of power to descend from the heavens was a clear size that it came from the grand formation which protected the entire Sacred Immortal Realm.

“Kill!” Firesurge had an ugly look on his face.

“Kill!” Prince Greatjoy bellowed out the same word.

The five of them attacked simultaneously!

.....

The stooped Daolord was at the entrance to the enormous prison, and his eyes were unspeakably cold and grim. The skies above him suddenly lit up as the previously ethereal-looking formation was activated, causing an enormous black serpent to appear out of nowhere and descend from the heavens at tremendous speeds as it shot towards the prison.

Just now, the stooped Daolord had intentionally been wasting some time chatting with them to buy himself enough time to unleash the power of the formation.

“All those who discover the existence of the Sacred Immortal Realm must perish.” A murderous look was in the stooped Daolord’s eyes, and the enormous serpent moved so quickly that it appeared before him in a flash. However... immediately afterwards, the stooped Daolord’s face turned pale. “WHAT?!”

His godsense was showing him what those five World-level cultivators were doing... and they were absolutely terrifying.

Of the five, Ji Ning and Heartlord Solewind were the fastest to attack.

“Heartworld, descend!” Solewind’s red robes fluttered as he glared towards the stooped Daolord coldly, and he showed no mercy at all when

he attacked.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

His heartworld projection instantly descended upon this area, causing the entire prison to boom violently. It was as though something incredibly heavy had smashed down upon it, and it was smashed apart as easily as a piece of tofu. This enormous prison was capable of holding countless cultivators prisoner, but for people on Ning's level it was incredibly fragile. Previously, they had been deep within the prison while the Daolord had been at the entrance, which meant they were separated by many different gates. It was simpler to just destroy the entire damn thing.

"What?!"

'B-but..."

Countless cultivators gawked in amazement at this scene. The jail cells they had been trapped in were all crushed into tiny pieces, but they themselves were left completely unscathed. This was a testament to how precise and masterful Heartlord Solewind was!

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

The million-plus golems were all knocked flat onto the ground under the crushing pressure of the heartworld projection. They weren't able to resist in the slightest.

"An Exalted Immortal!"

"A Grand Immortal!"

"The heavens have finally come to our aid!"

Countless cultivators stared at the red-robed Heartlord Solewind, who stood there like a veritable god. Heartlord Solewind seemed to have become the center of this entire world, and he stared at that distant, stooped Daolord as he sent the full weight of his heartworld projection crashing downwards.

"A Heartforce Cultivator?" The stooped figure was stunned.

"BREAK!"

Next to Heartlord Solewind was the white-robed Ji Ning, and his eyes were equally cold. Rumble. A terrifying mixture of electric light and watery light appeared around him. The seven types of Dao lightning and seven types of Dao water transformed into a series of divine swords. The many divine swords moved incredibly fast, quickly sweeping towards the distant stooped Daolord and forming a terrifying domain that was like a vortex of darkness which ground away at his form.

This was the Yin-Yang Sword Domain!

“A sword cultivator? How could he be as terrifying as this?!” The stooped Daolord was now completely flabbergasted, and he hurriedly controlled his black serpent and used it to protect himself.

The black serpent howled furiously as it struggled to ‘survive’. The surrounding Yin-Yang Sword Domain was like a deadly fishing net that had been tightly wrapped around the serpent’s form and furiously tearing away at it.

“Great Annihilation!” Prince Greatjoy had a similarly icy look on his face as he immediately unleashed his most powerful killer attack. His twin palms suddenly glittered with dazzling golden light as they instantly pierced through the skies, striking with invincible and deadly intent towards the stooped Daolord.

BOOM! When the enormous golden palms struck down upon the black serpent, the black serpent tried to endure the power... but with a rumble, it began to shake and then crack apart.

“Ahhhh!” The stooped Daolord let out a furious, terrified scream.

“Kill him!”

“Die.”

Skyfire Brightshore and Waterlord Firesurge simultaneously struck out. The former struck out with a blazing red tail while the latter sent out two enormous entwined water dragons that shot out. The black serpent was already at the brink of collapse due to Ning’s Yin-Yang Sword Intent and Prince Greatjoy’s attack. Now, it completely broke apart... and the power

of the Yin-Yang Sword Domain and the other attacks all simultaneously thundered down upon the Daolord's body. The Daolord did have other treasures he could use to defend himself, but he was completely unable to do so.

Boom!

He was completely, totally annihilated!

.....

Utter silence.

The countless cultivators all just stared in a dazed fashion. That invincibly powerful and utterly terrifying 'lord of devils', a man so strong that he made their souls quiver when they looked at him... had been instantly killed?

It really had been just an instant.

The five of them had only struck out a single time each! Ning had only made use of his Yin-Yang Sword Domain; he wasn't even given enough time to launch a second attack before the Daolord had died!

"We... we..." The countless cultivators stared at Ning's group.

"Bind them." Heartlord Solewind swept the area with his gaze. His heartworld projection had the appearance of an endless range of blazing mountains. As for the million-plus golems that were being suppressed by it, the death of their master had resulted in them instantly becoming ownerless. Thus, Heartlord Solewind was able to bind them all right away.

"Although these golems are fairly low-level, there's certainly a great deal of them. Let's split them up into five portions," Heartlord Solewind sent.

The other four didn't really care that much and so just waved their hands to accept it.

"This Daolord was really quite weak. I felt as though he was merely an ordinary Daolord of the First Step." Prince Greatjoy shook his head. "If it wasn't for the formation itself being incredibly powerful, brother Darknorth's sword-intent domain alone probably would've wiped him

out.”

Ning and the others all nodded. This Daolord had been very weak.

When Ji Ning, Solewind, and Greatjoy had attacked, their attacks had been blocked by the black serpent. In the end, it had been the attacks of Skyfire Brightshore and Firesurge which had caused the black serpent to collapse! As for the Daolord himself? He wasn't able to resist them in the slightest.

“I wonder... is there perhaps a second Daolord here in the Sacred Immortal Realm?” Prince Greatjoy was worried. “This one was far too weak, while the formation itself was rather strong.”

“It's quite rare for there to be a Daolord assigned to watch guard over a continent. Do you really think there would be a second one?” Solewind shook his head. “As for the power of the formation... perhaps this Daolord purchased it from somewhere else. Truly powerful Daolords generally wouldn't deign to do things like torture and torment mortal cultivators. Only the weaker Daolords would generally do such a thing. If there really was another Daolord here, he probably would've sent his godsense over to investigate long ago. If he did so, there's no way it would've been able to avoid interacting with my heartworld projection.”

“Mm.” Firesurge nodded in agreement. “These golems all belonged to the Daolord we just defeated. I think there probably was just one.”

“It doesn't matter if there was one or two,” Ning said. “Either way, we still need to go into the Daolord's estate in the very center of the continent! The formation remains active, after all, and the core of the formation is probably located within the Daolord's estate. Only if we go there will we be able to disrupt the formation and leave this place.”

“Let's go to the Daolord's estate.” Prince Greatjoy nodded. “If there are no other Daolords, things will be much simpler. If there is another Daolord, then we'll just have to give him a fight. There's no other options for us!”

Chapter 10: Karmic Virtue

If they wished to leave the Sacred Immortal Realm, they had to first enter the Daolord's estate.

Swoosh.

Ji Ning and the rest of the five transformed into streaks of light that flew into the air. Space rippled around them as they then disappeared.

Only now did these countless cultivators who had just been freed from torture, from their doom of eternal torment, finally come back to their senses. They had been too stunned by the death of that 'lord of the devils'.

"Thank you, five Exalted Immortals, for sparing our lives!"

"Thank you, Grand Immortals, for saving us from an eternity of suffering!"

"Thank you, seniors!"

Countless cultivators fell to their knees in gratitude. Tears streamed down their faces as they cried out their praises. Aside from the hundreds of millions of cultivators who had just recently been taken prisoner, there were the countless cultivators who had been imprisoned here long ago. They had suffered endless torment, and only the hope of ascension and escape had kept them alive. However... whenever those million-plus golems noticed anyone breaking through to the late Apotheosis stage, they would immediately kill that person! Thus, every century there was just a very small number of cultivators who managed to overcome their tribulations and ascend. The rest all died miserable, tormented deaths.

Now, they finally had release.

They would all be able to survive. The boundless hatred and rage which had built up over the course of countless years began to transform into gratitude towards Ning and the rest of the five.

.....

Ning's group of five void-blinked straight to the location of the

spacetime transfer array.

“These golems.” Heartlord Solewind waved his hand, easily binding the hundred-plus Elder God golems present here, then split them into five lots and gave each person a lot.

“What?”

“What’s going...”

“Does this mean...”

The tens of millions of cultivators who were bound to the stone pillars all raised their heads towards the skies, staring at Ning’s group of five. Those terrifying devils had been dealt with, as easily as that?

“From this day forth.” Heartlord Solewind swept them with his gaze as he summon his heartworld projection, smashing apart all the chains on every single cultivator. “You are no longer prisoners. You and the countless cultivators who were imprisoned in that jail were all free now. I hope you will all train hard and build up this ‘Sacred Immortal Realm’ into a place which is truly worthy of that name.”

“Freedom?” The tens of millions of cultivators were all stunned for a moment. Then, they began to tremble in excitement.

“Let’s go.” Ning’s group of five quickly departed. As far as they were concerned, helping out these mortal cultivators was nothing more than a casual act in passing. They naturally weren’t opposed to helping out.

The tens of millions of cultivators watched as those five airborne figures all disappeared. Only then did they come back to their senses and hurriedly kowtow, pressing their foreheads against the ground. “Thank you, Exalted Immortals!”

“Thank you for rescuing us, Exalted Immortals!”

“Finally, Immortals from the Heavens have come to deliver us!”

The cultivators cried out with hoarse sobs of excitement and gratitude.

.....

The towering Daolord's estate emanated an aura of faint green energy, and the estate itself seemed ethereal as well, as though it didn't quite exist at all.

Ning's group of five stared at it from afar quite cautiously.

"Eh?" Suddenly, a surge of strange power swept through the air and descended upon the bodies of Ning and the others. Apparently, faint layers of golden light were continuously descending upon them.

"What's this?" Ning and the others exchanged glances.

"Karmic merit," Solewind said softly. "What an enormous amount of karmic merit. All the karmic merit I've ever gained since I started cultivation isn't as much as this."

"This really is a lot of karmic merit," Prince Greatjoy said. "I once battled against an evil cult and rescued more than three hundred chaosworlds from their grasp, but I still didn't get as much karmic merit as I am right now."

Ning was quite shocked as well.

At their level of power, the effect of karmic merit was negligible, just icing on the cake. They might have slightly better luck while adventuring, but that was it. Still... this amount of karmic merit was simply ridiculous in size and scope. If others knew that rescuing these cultivators would result in such a reward of karmic merit, it was likely that many Daolords would run around seeking opportunities to rescue people.

Once your karmic merit reached a certain level, your luck would become better and better. Although it wouldn't be of much use to you in the Daomerge, it would still be of assistance when adventuring. In truth, however, you could run around rescuing chaosworld after chaosworld and you generally wouldn't gain as much as one-thousandth as much karmic merit as right now.

"Earlier, we all saw how the aura of hatred above in the prison had reached utterly shocking proportions," Solewind said. "This place had a simply ridiculous amount of hatred. It makes sense that the reward for

rescuing them is a similarly ridiculous amount of karmic merit. It goes without saying that the number of cultivators who were tortured to death by them over the years was simply unimaginable. Even though they died, their 'echoes' sent down karmic merit to us."

"Mm." Ning nodded.

The cultivators they had saved were mostly captured within the past few thousand years. The earlier cultivators had almost all been tortured to death. Compared to the number of cultivators they had saved, the number that had perished was far higher.

"The Daolord's estate..." Prince Greatjoy stared at the towering estate, hidden deep within the shadows of the faint green mist. "I feel as though it won't be an easy place to go through. Let us first try and see if we can destroy it."

"Mm. Worth a shot."

"If we can destroy it, we can then hopefully destroy the core of the formation which covers this entire Sacred Immortal Realm. That would be perfect." Ning and the others were all hoping for this outcome.

An estate which was being controlled by its master would possess incredibly strong defensive powers, but now the Daolord was dead. Ning's group did indeed stand a good chance of destroying it.

"I'll go first." Ning smiled as he walked through the air towards the distant Daolord's estate. As he moved forwards, his seven mighty streaks of Dao lightning and Dao water all flooded out as well, forming an enormous Yin-Yang Sword Domain. A dark and terrifyingly powerful domain appeared around him, completely annihilating all of the faint green mist as it furiously swept towards the estate-world.

"Break for me." Heartlord Solewind immediately summoned his heartworld projection, causing an entire world to come crashing down upon the estate.

"Shatter!" Prince Greatjoy flew over as well as he stretched out his giant golden palms. His palms were capable of unleashing the most savage

attacks amongst the five. Although Ning's own Blood Drop sword-intent was also a Supreme Dao, its advantage lay in its penetrating power. Prince Greatjoy, however, specialized in overwhelming, brutalizing power.

BOOM! BOOM!

Two enormous, heaven-covering golden palms came crashing down like a pair of titanic golden clouds. The golden palms came crashing downwards repeatedly, striking heavily upon the Daolord's estate. The air pressure generated by the blows was so great that an enormous palm-size imprint appeared in the ground around the estate.

"GWRAAAR!" Skyfire Brightshore transformed into his true form of a flame-bathed beast. His hooves kicked at the ground as his fiery tail lashed out in an aura of absolutely power.

As for Waterlord Firesurge, he charged forwards and launched attacks from all around the estate as well.

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The entrance to the Daolord's estate was open, and so Ning's Dao lightning and Dao thunder flooded straight through it, smashing through all obstacles in their path.

After causing absolute havoc for a brief period of time, it finally came to a halt.

"Eh? But the door to the estate is clearing open." The blazing beast once more transformed into a fiery-haired youth. "Brother Darknorth's lightning and water, as well as my lifeblood fire... and that heartworld projection of brother Solewind... it all flooded into the estate to cause damage. Why, then, is the formation covering this realm completely undisturbed?"

"Mm." Ning raised his head to stare into the skies as well. Golden runes could still be vaguely seen high up in the air. Clearly, the enormous formation hadn't been impacted at all.

"We probably haven't destroyed the core of the formation yet," Ning said. "Perhaps the core of the formation is located in some secret, hidden

location inside the estate.”

“Then what should we do now?” Solewind swept the area with his gaze.

“What can we do? Go inside!” Prince Greatjoy said coldly.

“Mm.” A murderous look flashed through Firesurge’s eyes as well.

Ning and the others all felt quite cautious about this Daolord’s estate. An estate was essentially a foe’s lair! If there really was another Daolord inside... fighting within the estate would be incredibly disadvantageous to Ning and the others.

But right now... there really was no way to tell whether or not there was a Daolord inside. If a Daolord truly decided to hide inside there and refused to come out, then Ning’s group would still have to go inside the estate and wreck the formation’s core in order to leave this Sacred Immortal Realm.

“Brother Darknorth, let us join forces to set up a defensive perimeter,” Solewind said.

“Alright.” Ning nodded.

Solewind’s heartworld projection was an excellent detection and warning system, whereas Ning’s Yin-Yang Sword Domain was a Supreme Dao of defense.

For now, the group of five was guarded by a chaotic domain of sword-intent as well as countless world-shadows.

Whoosh.

Ning’s group went straight to the entrance of the Daolord’s estate. Although they had hammered against the estate for quite some time, it remained completely undamaged.

They entered the estate through the main gate.

The estate was actually quite large inside, and its internal layout was quite complicated. There were quite a few dismembered and shattered golems located inside of it as well, all destroyed by the water, lightning, flames, and other attacks which the group had unleashed.

“What a large estate.” It was built almost like a maze. Ning’s group spent a full hour wandering inside of it, jointly defeating the various formations and restrictive spells as they extensively searched the place.

.....

At the deepest reaches of the Daolord’s estate, there was hovering passageway that was lined with fiery red stones.

Whooooosh. A blazing wind howled through the air above the hovering passageway.

There was a cave entrance located amongst the many boulders present in this place. Within this cave there was a black-robed Daolord who was seated in the lotus position. His aura was incredibly ancient, and he was unfathomably more powerful than the Daolord which Ning’s group had just slain. Images of Ning and the others wandering through the estate could be seen reflected off his eyes. “So these five World-level cultivators really did enter my estate! For World-level cultivators to be comparable to Daolords of the Second Step, and for five of them to appear at once... they have to have a truly incredible school behind them. Their master might be an extremely important member of the Church of Annihilation. Although they killed one of my retainers, I’d really rather not fight them unless absolutely necessary.”

“But... Master’s orders were clear. I am to guard this place diligently, and I am to slay any outsiders who invade this place.” The black-robed Daolord slowly shook his head.

Chapter 11: Boom! Boom! Boom!

The reverberations were quite weak by the time they made it to the black-robed Daolord.

“Moksha.” The black-robed Daolord called out to the creature. “Come here.”

“Yes, Master.” A rumbling voice rang out from below.

Whoosh.

A streak of light flew out from the depths of that levitating passageway, then landed within the fiery stone cave. This was a strange, incredibly muscular thing whose unclad body radiated a metallic light. Clearly, this was not a normal living creature. The creature held a black greataxe in its hands that was almost as long as he was tall, and upon entering he immediately knelt down respectfully. “Master, what is your bidding?”

The black-robed Daolord nodded. “Five World-level children have entered the Sacred Immortal Realm. Although they were merely at the World level, all of them can be said to have reached a level of power comparable to that of Daolords of the Second Step. The five of them have already entered my estate, and they are continuously advancing in this direction! I order you to go and wipe them out. Remember... no matter what, do not let them damage my ‘Prismatic Kiloleaf Flower’.”

“Moska understands,” the towering creature said respectfully.

“Then go,” the black-robed Daolord ordered.

The muscular creature instantly departed through the passageway as he continuously flew upwards. Soon, he reached the entry point to the bottommost layer of the estate.

The black-robed Daolord nodded slightly. He really didn’t care much about the death of that retainer, as the retainer had been someone who had only been able to break through thanks to a Pseudo Samsara Pill. His only real job was to assist the black-robed Daolord in torturing those mortal cultivators. Someone like the black-robed Daolord wouldn’t want

to lower himself or waste his energy on tormenting mortals. He would simply order his subordinates to do it for him.

“Five absolutely incredible World-level cultivators. They most likely stand a good chance of becoming absolutely incredible Daolords. A pity.” The black-robed Daolord let out a soft sigh. “Why did you have to come here?”

.....

Deep within the Daolord's estate.

Ji Ning and the rest of the five were still advancing forwards.

“There has to be a tremendous secret deep hidden within this path,” Prince Greatjoy said. “We've already encountered eight different restrictive seals on this path, and it took us tremendous amounts of effort to break through them. Why would they put this many seals here if this wasn't an important place?”

“We've broken quite a few seals in the estate, but no foes have emerged to face us. There probably really aren't any Daolords here,” Solewind laughed. “I hope everything will continue to be this easy. That would be just wonderful.”

“I hope that is the case as well.”

They advanced through the passageway, delving deeper and deeper through the various layers of the estate. Suddenly, an enormous stone door appeared at the end of the path before them. This stone door was covered by strange carvings which emanated a dark, sinful aura. Just looking at it made the five of them uncomfortable. In truth, they had all noticed that it seemed as though the entire estate was filled with the aura of hatred and sin, with the aura being especially pronounced in certain areas.

Crackle, crackle, crackle. Solewind's heartworld projection and Ning's sword-intent domain both slammed into the stone door.

Golden runes immediately appeared on the surface of the stone door and began to flow across it. The runes were incredibly powerful, and they

weren't damaged in the slightest by the attacks.

Heartlord Solewind carefully unexpected the formation which had just appeared atop the stone door. Of the five, Heartlord Solewind possessed the highest level of skill in the Dao of Formations. He spent quite a bit of time, head upraised, as he stared at the stone door.

"Do as I say," Heartlord Solewind instructed. "Brother Ji Ning, strike out with your sword using maximum force and destroy the runes over here."

His heartworld projection immediately caused a particular part of the runes to light up.

"Brothers Firesurge and Skyfire, the two of you shall attack these two places." Heartlord Solewind once more left behind sparkles of light atop the stone door, this time pointing out two areas with runes at the very top and very bottom of the stone door.

"Brother Greatjoy, all you need to do is to launch full-strength blows against this door," Solewind laughed. "Leave the rest to me."

To use raw, brute force to breach the formations would be incredibly difficult. If you were skilled in the art of formations, things would be much easier. Even if you weren't able to overcome the formation by yourself, if you could point out certain critical areas and then focus your efforts on those areas, it would be hundreds of times easier than simply trying to brute-force the entire thing.

"Everyone... attack!" Heartlord Solewind barked.

Swish!

Ning struck out with his sword.

The sword struck out without creating any sound, but in the instant that it stabbed against the divine runes, its might was fully unleashed along with a terrifyingly strong penetrative power. If Ning wished it, he would be able to tear space apart and enter a completely different spatial dimension. The runes were completely pierced through and ripped apart by Ning's strike, resulting in the formation covering the stone door to begin to tremble.

In truth, a small part of such a large formation being destroyed normally wouldn't have much of an impact. Only a critical part of the formation being destroyed would.

"Good." Heartlord Solewind revealed a look of delight.

Ning's sword was indeed quite terrifying. Previously, as they had been breaching one sealed barrier after another within the estate, they had encountered a particularly nettlesome barrier that not even Prince Greatjoy had been able to break. In the end, it was Ning who had stepped up and used his sword to stab through a critical part of the formation. All of them had been stunned by how terrifyingly strong Ning's sword was.

In terms of raw, overwhelming attack power, Prince Greatjoy was the strongest of the five.

In terms of viciousness... Ning's sword was the deadliest.

"Attack!" Skyfire Brightshore and Firesurge simultaneously attacked, the former using fire and the latter using water. These two were diametrically different types of energy, and they were equal in power. As a result, when they joined forces they resulted in an absolutely explosive amount of energy being unleashed. Skyfire had truly grown much stronger in recent years, perhaps because the twelve scrolls of the [Sutra of Eternity] was indeed an incredible technique. By now, Skyfire was just as strong as Firesurge, who had been the weakest member of the four elites of the Twelve Palaces.

"Break." Prince Greatjoy sent his enormous golden palms crashing downwards towards the two sides of the closed stone door.

Rumble...

The sealing barrier twisted, no longer able to endure the surging power that had been brought to bear against it. With a rumbling sound, the closed stone door began to swing open as the barrier naturally broke apart.

The two sides of the stone door were smashed open by the twin palms, revealing an empty pavilion behind them.

“So we have reached the end of this passageway?” Ning and the others were all stunned. They had encountered multiple barriers on the way over and had felt certain that there would be another passageway beyond the stone doors. Who would’ve thought that it would instead be a pavilion?

Ning and the other four advanced with caution, surrounded by the heartworld projection and the sword-intent domain. They walked through the stone door and into the pavilion.

The empty pavilion was roughly thirty thousand meters in size. An extremely muscular form was seated within the pavilion. The creature was completely crimson in color, and even its eyes were blazing with fire. It didn’t look like an ordinary living creature at all.

“A golem?” Greatjoy frowned.

“What a powerful golem.” Solewind’s face tightened as well.

“The Daolord we killed was merely at the first step. Why is there such a powerful golem here?” Ning’s heart sank. They could all tell that this was nothing more than a powerful golem, but it was different from those weaker golems that had existed in the Sacred Immortal Realm. Those golems were at the Elder God level of strength at most. This one... it was at the Daolord level.

Its aura was so weighty and dense that there was no way an ordinary Daolord could match it in might.

Whoooosh. There was another stone door on the other end of the palace. That tightly sealed stone door was covered with a layer of deep green energy that radiated hatred, with the hatred so dense that furiously roaring faces would constantly appear on its surface. Unfathomable amounts of dense elemental energy were being gathered from the surrounding areas, then channel into and through the stone door.

“The hatred and malice is all gathering here? What on earth is behind that stone door?” Ning realized that they were getting very close to uncovering some of the secrets behind the Sacred Immortal Realm.

The five of them exchanged a glance, their hearts sinking. They all knew

that this would most likely be the most deadly battle yet in this alternate universe... and that it was possible they might die here.

“We have entered the Archaeus region on the orders of our master. I’d like to ask for you to give way and release the five of us from this Sacred Immortal Realm,” Solewind said. “If there is anything you want from us, just tell us.”

The massive golem, seated in the lotus position, slowly raised his head and stared at Ning’s group with his fiery eyes. His lips parted in a savage smile as he rose to his feet, then stretched out his left hand. Instantly, an enormous black shield appeared within it. He then stretched out his right hand, causing an enormous greataxe to appear.

A shield in one hand, a greataxe in the other... and his aura completely exploded forth, sweeping through the entire palace and causing it to echo and thunder.

“I want...” The massive golem’s voice boomed forth, “For you all to die!”

BOOM!

The golem transformed into a streak of light as it charged straight towards Ning’s group.

Chapter 12: In Danger of Dying

The entire pavilion was merely thirty thousand meters in size, and thus it was completely filled by the Yin-Yang Sword Domain. Torrents of electric light and watery light transformed into enormous swords that furiously hacked at everything near them. The towering golem was assaulted by endless attacks, but it simply roared with fury as it charged towards Ning's group. The Yin-Yang Sword Domain wasn't able to do anything to it at all.

Whoosh. Heartlord Solewind rose high up into the air, his red robes fluttering. He actually seemed to transform into a divine bird that was bathed in flames. More and more of these flaming birds began to appear in the area around him, as well as enormous amounts of blazing lava.

"Focus." Solewind instantly manifested a total of eighteen arms, and each arm represented a beak of a firebird as they all flew towards that golem.

"Kill!"

"Attack!"

Skyfire Brightshore and Waterlord Firesurge joined forces in a practiced manner. They had long ago grown accustomed to combination attacks, and thus they sent intertwined attacks of water and fire straight towards the golems.

As for Ning, he first used [Three Heads, Six Arms], then drew out his six divine swords. Prince Greatjoy actually manifested six arms as well, a rare sight to behold. The two of them had the most powerful attacks... and were the final ones to attack.

"GWAAAAR!" The massive golem roared furiously as it chopped horizontally with the massive black greataxe in its hand.

This chop seemed to sever the heavens from the earth itself. Ning and the others all instantly felt their hearts turn cold!

Heartlord Solewind had used his heartworld projection to manifest

eighteen blazing firebirds, but they were all chopped into two pieces by this blow.

“Careful.” Skyfire Brightshore was sent flying back by the chop as well, and he furiously cried out to warn the others.

Whooooosh.

Waterlord Firesurge’s body was cleaved apart at the waist. Blood flew everywhere, and a look of shock and rage was in his eyes. And then, his entire body transformed into a flow of water that tried to flee.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

Prince Greatjoy’s six enormous golden palms began to descend from the skies, striking against the edge of that greataxe and preventing it from continuing its attacks. Thanks to him, Skyfire and Firesurge were saved.

“Brother Darknorth!” Prince Greatjoy vomited out a mouthful of blood as he flew backwards, but he still managed to send an urgent mental call to Ning.

Six silent streaks of sword-light. As Prince Greatjoy tied down the greataxe, the six streaks of sword-light scraped past it and stabbed directly towards the fingers of the golem’s right hand. Ning knew very well that this was a golem which was as tough and resilient as a magical treasure! To actually destroy this golem? Not even a Daolord of the Fourth Step would be able to do this, to say nothing of Ning.

Ning’s Blood Drop stance had penetrating power, true... but it wouldn’t be able to pierce through the golem’s body by even an inch!

Thus, Ning had only one goal – to attack the finger-joints on the golem’s right hand, then seize its greataxe! Ning had been able to tell quite quickly that this golem was at an extremely high level of skill in wielding a greataxe. If Ning was able to disarm it and take the greataxe, the golem would instantly lose the majority of its power! This was similar to how if Ning himself lost his six Eternal swords he would only be able unleash 10-20% of his true power!

Crunch. Clang!

The six streaks of sword-light simultaneously stabbed into different finger-joints on the golem's right hand. The terrifying penetrative power of the Blood Drop stance caused the fingers of the mighty golem's right hand to involuntarily unclench just slightly, causing its grip over the greataxe to grow weak.

Ning was delighted to see this. Just as he was about to move forwards and seize the greataxe...

"Darknorth, careful!" Solewind's voice rang out in Ning's mind.

"Eh?!" Ning's face turned pale, because an enormous shield was crashing towards his head with an absolutely unstoppable amount of power!

The golem smiled coldly as it sent its enormous shield spinning towards Ning. Its greatest proficiency lay in the art of using shields! It was created in order to serve as a guardian for its master in dangerous situations, so as to help buy its master some extra time. The only reason it was also quite skilled in wielding axes was because it had been assigned to work as a miner for countless years now. Still... comparatively speaking, its true expertise still lay in wielding shields.

Rumble...

When the shield came crashing down, it was as though the skies themselves were pressing down upon Ning. Even a chaos star would most likely be reduced to dust by a blow from this shield! As the shield moved closer and closer to Ning, layers of multicolored space generated by the terrifying pressure began to appear right in front of it.

There was no way for Ning to seize the greataxe. All he could do was to use his sword-arts to defend as best as he could.

BOOM!!!!

The shield slammed directly onto Ning's six swords. Although Ning was skilled in using his longswords to defend, that meant very little when there was such an enormous disparity in power. The shield crushed through Ning's six arms and slammed into Ning's body. Ning felt his head grow dim as he was sent flying backwards with a boom. He almost instantly

slammed into the walls of the pavilion, and blood immediately spewed out of his mouth.

The faces of Prince Greatjoy, Heartlord Solewind, Skyfire Brightshore, and Waterlord Firesurge all turned pale when they saw this. They were all completely stunned.

The strike from that shield... it was far more powerful than the strikes from the greataxe had been!

“You actually made me lose my grip over my greataxe. What a formidable sword-art! I’ll make your death a cleaner one.” The golem charged forwards, each step causing the pavilion to tremble. He continued to wield the shield in one hand and the greataxe in the other as he pounced towards Ning. Clearly, the fact that Ning had caused him to temporarily lose his grip over his greataxe had rather irritated him.

Prince Greatjoy and the others felt their hearts turn cold when they saw this. Right now, they didn’t really care about the greataxe any longer. It was that shield which had them worried.

“I, I...” Ning’s mind was still woozy, and he was only slowly regaining full consciousness.

Just now, he had been knocked completely unconscious for a brief moment. Thankfully, he had a suit of Eternal armor protecting him, and had already completely mastered the [Golden Idol] technique. That was the only reason why he had been able to survive that terrifying strike! If he had a slightly inferior protective divine ability, such as one which only made his body comparable to the toughness of an ordinary Dao weapon, he probably would’ve died from that collision.

Thankfully, Ning’s body was as tough as a top-grade Dao weapon. It wasn’t that easy to destroy.

“Dodge, brother Darknorth!” Prince Greatjoy once more struck out with his six golden palms towards the golem, and the golem once more bashed out with his shield, causing that immense level of power to once more descend upon the cultivators.

BOOOOOM!

The six golden palms collided head-on with the enormous shield!

In truth, Prince Greatjoy's palm-arts were actually quite similar in function and effect to the golem's shield. In fact, Prince Greatjoy's techniques actually evinced a much deeper understanding of the Dao! The problem was that the golem was simply too overwhelmingly powerful. Prince Greatjoy just barely qualified as having the physical power of a Daolord of the First Step, but this golem had the power of an apex Daolord of the Third Step! Even though its technique was rather weak, perhaps comparable to just that of a supreme World God, it would still be able to completely dominate Prince Greatjoy.

For a golem to be able to reach a level of mastery in using a shield which was comparable to that of a supreme World God was actually quite incredible. After all, golems were by nature far inferior to true cultivators in terms of being able to understand the Dao.

Bang!

Golden light radiated from every part of Prince Greatjoy's body, making him seem as though he was made out of gold. And yet, he couldn't help but spit out a mouthful of golden liquid as he was sent flying backwards. Still, his interception gave Ning the time he needed to fully regain consciousness.

"DIE!" The golem struck out with his greataxe once more, this time chopping towards Skyfire Brightshore and Waterlord Firesurge.

"Kill him." Ning had come back to his senses, and a cold look was in his eyes.

Whooooosh.

A slight ripple suddenly appeared with the pavilion. The ripple was very delicate, and even Ning's Yin-Yang Sword Domain found it difficult to detect it. However, once the ripple moved next to the golem, the golem revealed a look of shock.

Swish!

A vicious, insidious streak of sword-light suddenly appeared, avoiding both the greataxe and shield as it slashed at the golem's head.

Rumble...

The golem couldn't help but be knocked backwards. As it was knocked backwards, that viper-like streak of sword-light appeared once more. This time, it actually began to twist as it quickly bound the golem up in rings of sword-light, completely trussling it up.

"Get in here." A figure wreathed in black mist suddenly appeared, causing the golem to disappear with a wave of the hand. The figure glanced at Ning. "Per Master's orders, you are permitted to have me help you one time. Now that I have dealt with this golem, I have completed my promise."

"Mm." Ning was still slumped on the ground of the pavilion. He nodded.

This figure wreathed in black mist was one of the four golems which Emperor Mirrorsnow had prepared for his personal disciples... the golem known as 'the assassin'!

Whoosh.

The assassin instantly disappeared, returning to the world of the Mirrorsnow Painting.

Within that world.

The assassin, the golden-robed emperor, the fisherman, and the swordsman were all together, staring at the shield-bearing and axe-wielding golem.

"You really moved quite quickly," the golden-robed emperor laughed.

"This guy isn't too bad. He can be considered to be as physically strong as an apex Daolord of the Third Step," the assassin said coldly. "His shield-wielding techniques are weak, though, and his greataxe-wielding abilities are even weaker. Overall, he can just barely be considered as strong as a weak Daolord of the Third Step. I was the perfect counter for him in every respect. This was an easy win."

The four of them were all comparable to apex Daolords of the Third Step. In terms of speed and power, they had actually reached the threshold of Daolords of the Fourth Step, and they all had exceedingly profound sword-arts. Although Ning had 'defeated' them, that was because Emperor Mirrorsnow had ordered them to only use a certain level of sword-arts! But of course, their skills were slightly inferior to that of the sword-arts of a true Daolord of the Third Step. Thus, they averaged out to be as strong as an apex Daolord of the Third Step!

Strength? Speed? Comprehension? They surpassed this new golem in every way.

.....

Within the pavilion.

Ning continued to sit there on the ground. Waterlord Firesurge slowly reformed his true body out of the currents of water, while Skyfire Brightshore turned to look towards Ning. Solewind let out a long, relaxed sigh. As for Prince Greatjoy? He began to roar with laughter.

"That was close," Solewind laughed.

"Brother Darknorth, I owe you my life." Prince Greatjoy looked towards Ning.

Ning let out a sigh of relief as well.

That golem had brought them far, far too much pressure! In the end, they were still just a five-man group of World-level cultivators. When faced with a golem that was comparable to a Daolord of the Third Step, they were completely flattened with each class. If too much time passed, they probably would've lost their lives.

Chapter 13: Robed Daolord

“Thanks, Darknorth.” Skyfire Brightshore and Waterlord Firesurge both looked towards Ji Ning gratefully. Just now, had Ning been just one moment too slow, the two of them would’ve perished. Of the five, the two of them were undoubtedly the weakest.

“Brother Darknorth, just now I saw a dark figure appear, capture the golem, then say something about only helping you once?” Prince Greatjoy frantically asked, “We’ve disposed of the golem, but it was probably just equivalent to a Daolord of the Third Step. There’s no way its master was the Daolord we slew earlier... which means that it is highly likely that a second Daolord resides within the estate. If we can’t even deal with his golem... we’re probably going to be in grave danger once that Daolord attacks.”

The others all understood this point as well. They had disposed of the golem and managed to stay alive, buying themselves some extra breathing time, but the danger was still there! Still... there was nothing that could be done! If there truly was an even more powerful Daolord here, there was nothing they could do except face him. This was the Daolord’s estate, after all. They were on enemy grounds.

“Yes, he can only help me once.” Ning nodded. “My master once said I can’t rely on him to deal with every danger I encounter, which is why I’ll only be assisted a single time.”

Greatjoy, Solewind, and the others all nodded. They understood this principle.

Ning didn’t reveal the fact that he had three more golems. It was best for him to be able to leave a few more trump cards up his sleeve.

“Skyfire, you are a member of the Imperials. Don’t you have any trump cards of your own? If Darknorth had been just one second slower, you would’ve been finished.” Greatjoy glanced at Skyfire. The five had completely severed this local region of spacetime from the rest of the estate, and Solewind’s heartworld projection was keeping a close watch as

well. There was no way any form of godsense or heartforce would be able to spy on them.

Skyfire laughed awkwardly. "So what if I'm a Brightshore Imperial? Shortly after I joined the kingdom, I was dragged off by the Hegemon and sent here to the Archaeus region. Since the entire point of this adventure is for me to learn and grow, he naturally refused to give me any protective treasures at all. Once you have too many trump cards, an excursion like this would no longer be an 'adventure', it would be 'tourism'. So... I really don't have any trump cards at all."

Ning and the others were truly surprised to hear this.

It was very hard for cultivators like them to acquire particularly powerful trump cards they could use. Ning himself had to become the personal disciple of Emperor Mirrorsnow before he learned that he would have four golems who could each assist him once. Most likely, the other disciples of Emperor Mirrorsnow wouldn't divulge this fact either.

The more powerful a golem was, the more valuable it would be. A golem that was comparable to a Verge-level Daolord would be an utterly priceless treasure. Even the Sword Palace itself had only been able to acquire a few such golems over the course of countless chaos cycles! Daolord Allgod was an incredible grandmaster of artificing, but even he was only able to create a single such golem in his lifetime, one which he would never even think about selling. After all, there was simply no way one could possibly find another such golem of tremendous power and unswerving loyalty!

Emperor Mirrorsnow similarly had just a single golem of such power. In the end, he had traded it for forty golems that were comparable to apex Daolords of the Third Step which he left behind to his personal disciples.

Thus... it truly was quite rare and difficult for one to acquire truly powerful golems! Weaker golems, those which were comparable to Daolords of the First Step or Second Step, were much more common. Every single one of the twelve Daolord Cloudworlds of the Twelve Palaces had an enormous number of these golems.

As Ning and the others saw it, the person in their group who was most likely to have a truly, ridiculously powerful trump card had to be Skyfire Brightshore! After all, his backer was the almighty Hegemon, someone who could truly be described as standing at the absolute apex of the Endless Territories! Even the most casual of trump cards bestowed by the almighty Hegemon would be terrifyingly powerful. Alas... Skyfire's response disappointed all four of them.

"Ugh. This is going to be tricky. That shieldbearer golem was roughly comparable to a Daolord of the Third Step. Those golems are very expensive. His master might very well be a Verge-level Daolord." Prince Greatjoy was rather worried.

.....

Ning sent a divine power clone to descend upon the estate-world of the Mirrorsnow Painting.

"Gentlemen." Ning looked at the assassin, the fisherman, the golden-robed emperor, and the swordsman.

"Can you help me bind this golem?" Ning glanced at the captured shieldbearer golem. Although it was much weaker than the golems which Emperor Mirrorsnow had left behind, it still had the power of a Daolord of the Third Step and was capable of dominating Ning's group and even killing them in a short period of time.

Alas, Ning had 'cheated' by releasing an even more terrifying golem... the assassin.

"Even if we helped you tie it down, you wouldn't be able to bind it." The golden-robed emperor shook his head. "All we can do is keep it trapped here and make sure it can't fight back. In the end, it is still an extraordinary golem, while your Immortal energy remains at the World level. If you wish to forcibly send your energy into the golem's body and wipe out its master's seal... there's no way you can do it."

Ning nodded. He had simply hoped that the four golems might have some special tricks.

A mighty golem comparable to a Daolord of the Third Step was right in front of him, helpless and bound, but there was no way for him to bind it. It was a pity that his azureflower mist energy was unable to leave his body. Otherwise, he might've been able to use it to bind the golem instead.

"I have a question for you." Ning shifted his gaze to the golem.

"Hmph." The towering golem let out a cold snort. "Stop struggling, brat. The five of you are all going to die. You have no idea who you just pissed off."

"Oh? And who did we just piss off?" Ning smirked.

"Hmph." The towering golem swept the area with his gaze, his eyes blazing with fire. He let out a snicker. "There are some things which I cannot speak about... but although these golems of yours are a bit stronger than me, they aren't that much stronger. Even if all of them helped you out, you still would have no chance at all of surviving this encounter. You won't even be able to fight back."

Ning laughed coldly. "Oh, so you were talking about the Daolord behind you?"

"You'll know soon enough." The towering golem shut his mouth, saying nothing further. There were some secrets which even he didn't dare to divulge. He had received strict orders long ago regarding these matters, and as a golem he would never violate the orders he was given.

Ning couldn't help but begin to worry even more. Judging from the golem's behavior, the golem seemed to feel supremely confident in the outcome of this fight. Why? What gave it such confidence?

Were the five of them really going to die here?

Ning wasn't that afraid, as he had a clone in the outside world which would allow him to rebuild his body. Although he would've lost six Eternal weapons, four powerful golems, and the seven streaks of Dao water and Dao lightning in his body... he would still be alive. The price he paid for dying here would be a heavy one, but so long as he remained alive there would always be more possibilities in the future.

But Ning had no idea as to whether or not Greatjoy, Solewind, Skyfire Brightshore, and Firesurge had clones in the outside world. There were some secrets which you simply didn't ask or tell others.

Within the pavilion.

Although the five of them knew that the situation was dangerous, they had no way out. They had to face it.

"Break!" The five of them joined forces once more to slam open the stone doors on the other side of the pavilion.

Rumble... the stone doors began to slowly swing open.

"This..." Ning and the others all took deep breaths. The aura of hatred and resentment here had to be a thousand times greater than the aura had been in the air above the great prison. The hatred was so intense, it had liquefied into a deep green pool that was swirling in a vortex of more than a hundred 'streams' of hatred that circled an absolutely beautiful, enormous flower.

This flower had many black leaves. Ning counted exactly a thousand of those black leaves, and they were layered atop each other in a strange, evil, yet beautiful way.

Atop the leaves there were the soul-stirringly beautiful petals. The flower petals were multicolored and emanated an aura of intoxicating fragrance. They were truly dazzling in their beauty, and they emanated faint streams of rainbow light.

"Was all that hatred meant to nourish this flower?" Ning and the others felt their hearts tremble when they saw this sight.

The deep green streams of hatred all centered around this pool, condensing into an actual liquid form which then split off in a hundred streams which were used to nourish the flower in an extremely detail-oriented manner.

"A Prismatic Kiloleaf Flower?" Heartlord Solewind murmured these words softly.

“Aren’t those flowers supposed to be impossible to cultivate? I thought they could only grow naturally in certain environments.” Prince Greatjoy was shocked as well. Ning and the others all had heard of the awe-inspiringly famous ‘Prismatic Kiloleaf Flowers’, which were known throughout the Endless Territories. It was one of several precious ingredients that were needed to refine some truly powerful magic treasures, and it was incredibly precious. A single flower would be worth roughly a million cubes of chaos nectar.

However, based on what Ning and the others knew, these flowers could only grow in natural environments. But now, it seemed as though there was a major power who was capable of actually growing them.

“Yes. This is a Prismatic Kiloleaf Flower.” A voice suddenly rang out.

Ning and the others simultaneously turned their heads to look. They saw a streak of dark light slowly manifest in the skies, revealing an ethereal figure which slowly began to materialize into a black-robed Daolord.

The black-robed Daolord landed, staring at the Prismatic Kiloleaf Flower with a distant look in his eyes. He then turned to sweep the five of them with his gaze. “The five of you are able to match Daolords of the Second Step, despite merely being at the World level. I imagine you all have incredible backgrounds! Not even my master himself would be willing to offend the major power who undoubtedly stands behind you.”

Ning and the others all felt their hearts turned cold. The more casually this Daolord spoke, the more nervous they became. Only someone who possessed an absolutely overwhelming advantage in power would act so casually.

“If that’s the case, then why don’t you let us leave, senior? We can immediately swear oaths to never divulge any information regarding the Sacred Immortal realm to anyone,” Solewind said.

“Haven’t you noticed? Ever since you entered the Sacred Immortal Realm, all your connections to the outside world have been completely cut off.” The black-robed Daolord looked curiously at them. “The reason we set up the formation which separated this realm from the rest of the

universe was to prevent anyone from leaking information about it. And now that you've seen the Prismatic Kiloleaf Flower... don't you know who you've just offended?"

Ning and the others blinked. They really had no idea, because they weren't from this universe.

"Given how monstrously talented you are, the sect behind you has to be an incredibly powerful one. I imagine that your sect would've told you about the most powerful members of the Church of Annihilation." The black-robed Daolord was puzzled. "The only person in the entire universe who can grow these Prismatic Kiloleaf Flowers is my master, Emperor Trisilk? Don't you know anything?"

Chapter 14: Two Options to Choose

Ji Ning and the others exchanged glances, their hearts quivering.

Emperor Trisilk?

They had naturally never heard of this 'Emperor Trisilk' before, but even a fool could understand that he had to be an Eternal Emperor! And supposedly, he was the master of this black-robed Daolord and was the only person in this entire alternate universe who could plant Prismatic Kiloleaf Flowers. Clearly, he was not just an Eternal Emperor, he was an incredible one.

The five of us just wanted to journey through the Archaeus region. How the hell did we manage to run afoul of an Eternal Emperor?

When the black-robed Daolord saw how the faces of Ning and the others all turned pale, he couldn't help but laugh. "It seems you now understand."

"So what if he is an Eternal Emperor? My master slays Eternal Emperors as easily as turning over his hand," Prince Greatjoy said coldly. "You had best let us go. Otherwise... given my master's abilities, he'll definitely be able to find out who killed us, even if it ends up being a bit troublesome for him! It won't just be you who will be doomed; Emperor Trisilk himself won't be able to withstand Master's wrath!"

"No need to threaten me." The black-robed Daolord smiled. "The five of you are at the World level, but talented enough to match Daolords of the Second Step. Not even my master himself has five such talented disciples under his tutelage. I find it highly likely that one of the sixteen Starkings of the Church of Annihilation stands behind the five of you. Am I right?"

Ning and the others were stunned.

They knew a bit about the Church of Annihilation. The most exalted member of the Church of Annihilation was, without a doubt, its legendary leader! Their leader was the person who unified this entire alternate universe, and he was unspeakably powerful to the point of being virtually

omnipotent. Most likely, not even the almighty Hegemon would be a match for him.

Second to the leader were the sixteen Starkings.

Below the Starkings were the mighty Paladins.

The 'Nine Godstars sect' which Ning's group had originally encountered upon entering this alternate universe only had a single Paladin in their organization! Generally speaking, ordinary Verge-level Daolords were not qualified to be given the rank of 'Paladin'. Only breathtakingly powerful Daolords, along with Eternal Emperors, were qualified to be called 'Paladins'!

"As I said a while ago, not even my master would wish to offend the person who stands behind the five of you. Alas... it was your own fault for barging into the Sacred Immortal Realm. It no longer matters how powerful the person who stands behind you is." The black-robed Daolord laughed. "In order to prevent your school and master from tracking you down... as soon as you entered my estate, I sent my subordinates to destroy the spacetime transfer arrays linking the 'Mortal Realm' with this 'Sacred Immortal Realm'."

"Ah?!" Ning and the others were stunned.

"From this day forth, that 'Mortal Realm' will no longer be connected to this world of ours." The black-robed Daolord sighed. "Because of the five of you, I had to sacrifice a large continent. Alas, I had to ensure that there would be no way for your school to trace you to this place and attack me here. I decided to remove all traces of your passing right away."

If the spacetime transfer array between the Mortal Realm and the Sacred Immortal Realm was destroyed, then even if a major power managed to track Ning's group to the Mortal Realm, there would be no way for him to find out where the Sacred Immortal Realm was located.

"In the outside world, the only person who even knows this 'Sacred Immortal Realm' exists is my master." The black-robed Daolord smiled coldly. "As for myself, I've been permanently assigned to this place. Without Master's permission, even I shall never be permitted to leave. As

for the formation which surrounds this realm, my master was the one who personally set it up. It ensures that this realm is completely separated from the rest of the world. Even if you have other clones outside, there will be no way you can sense where this realm is.”

“Thus... no one knows that you are here, and no one will be able to find you. As for fighting back? Hmph. My master personally set up this formation, and I’m the only person who can fully unleash its power. Not even a Verge-level Daolord who stumbles into this place would be a match for me.” The black-robed Daolord swept the five with his gaze. “However... I have decided to give you a way to survive.”

“A way to survive?” Ning and the others stared at the black-robed Daolord. They had guessed long ago that the Daolord had ulterior motives, which was why he had spoken to them for so long. If he truly wanted to kill them, he would’ve done so long ago. Why would he first let them view the Prismatic Kiloleaf Flower and ensure they felt despair at knowing they had transgressed against Emperor Trisilk?

If they truly were geniuses who belonged to this universe, they probably would’ve felt despair upon hearing Emperor Trisilk’s name.

Emperor Trisilk was a true demon who had committed towering sins, and it was his idea to use enormous amounts of hatred to nourish Prismatic Kiloleaf Flowers. Just imagine how skilled he was in sin and how steeped he was in hate, for him to be able to manipulate it so effectively? As a man who had committed many sins, he had offended many major powers over the course of his life... and yet, he was still alive. Although he was merely a Paladin of the Church of Annihilation, he truly was skilled in staying alive.

Most importantly of all... Emperor Trisilk’s true specialty lay in torture. He could torture even Daolords to the brink of insanity, causing them to choose to commit suicide or to submit to him. All of his disciples were skilled in torture as well.

“Yes, a way to survive. If you are willing to swear lifeblood oaths to serve me forever and to obey my orders as my slaves, I’ll spare you.” The black-

robed Daolord stared at Ning's group, his eyes gleaming. The five of them were all monstrously talented cultivators who could become Daolords whenever they chose. Once they became Daolords, their future potential would be limitless. It was entirely possible that all five of them would become more powerful than the black-robed Daolord himself. And, if he had them work for him as miners after they became Daolords, they would definitely be far more effective than the shieldbearer golem.

His master had given him strict orders, true... but that was to prevent any secrets from being released. If these five swore lifeblood oaths to become his slaves, then there was naturally no chance of anything going astray. Even better, with these extra subordinates helping him mine this place he would be able to finish his task much faster and thus no longer need to remain here.

"Become slaves?" The faces of all five tightened.

"Impossible," Solewind roared angrily.

"Nothing is impossible." The black-robed Daolord laughed. "In the face of death... everything becomes possible."

"Change your conditions," Solewind growled. "We would die before becoming your slaves. We can carry out tasks for you and swear to divulge no information about this place to the outside world, but there's absolutely no way we will become your slaves."

The smile disappeared from the black-robed Daolord's face, only to be replaced by an icy coldness. "You only have one choice – become slaves and live, or die!"

"Let us think it over." Solewind gritted his teeth.

The black-robed Daolord stared coldly at the five of them. "Make it fast." As he spoke, a savage-looking serpent began to appear in the air around him. The giant serpent coiled around the black-robed Daolord as it stared coldly at Ning's group with its emotionless reptilian eyes. Ning and the others couldn't help but shiver when they saw this. They knew that it could probably wipe them out in a single blow.

“What should we do?” Solewind, Ning, Greatjoy, Skyfire, and Firesurge traded glances.

“The power of this formation truly is incredible. He was telling the truth. Here in the Sacred Immortal Realm, not even Verge-level Daolords would be able to defeat him.” Prince Greatjoy sent mentally, “What should we do? I have a few trump cards, but they would at most be able to deal with Daolords of the Third Step. They wouldn’t even be enough to deal with that shieldbearer golem we just fought, much less this Daolord.”

“Right.” Firesurge had an ugly look on his face as well. As for Skyfire, he didn’t say a word. He really didn’t have any trump cards at all.

The black-robed Daolord sat there leisurely next to the Prismatic Kiloleaf Flower, the enormous black serpent continuing to coil around him. He said softly, “Tell me your choice. Do you choose life... or death?”

“LIFE!” A voice suddenly rang out.

The black-robed Daolord cracked a smile as he looked at the speaker.

As for Ning, him and three others also stared at the speaker in astonishment.

It was Heartlord Solewind.

Heartlord Solewind had just crushed an odd-looking jade pendant in his hands, causing an arcane surge of terrifying power to descend.

Whooosh.

It was formless. Colorless. Shapeless.

Ning and the others couldn’t see it or sense it at all; all they could sense was that something utterly terrifying had just appeared as a wave of something washed over them. The black-robed Daolord’s smile turned stiff, and a look of utter terror appeared in his eyes. He opened his mouth as though he was about to say something... but then, all traces of life fled from his body.

The only thing left was his seated corpse, and it no longer had any trace of life in it at all. As for the terrifying serpent that had been created by the

power of the formation? It completely dissipated into nothingness.

“He died?” Ning and the other three were boggled as they stared at Heartlord Solewind.

“Ugh. Just like that, I was forced to use up the life-saving Dao-seal the Heartforce Palace bestowed up on me.” Heartlord Solewind sighed softly. “Dao-seals like that aren’t available for sale anywhere. The power of each seal is incredibly great, equivalent to the Palace Lord himself striking with 30% of his maximum power. It could easily kill even a Verge-level Daolord.”

Ning and the others were speechless.

Good heavens. A Dao-seal comparable to a 30% maximum power strike from the Palace Lord of the Palace of the Heart? The Heartforce Palace truly had very few Daolords, but it was one of the most terrifying palaces of the Twelve Palaces precisely because each of them truly were incredibly powerful. As for the Palace Lord, if he was to personally intervene even Eternal Emperors would turn pale with fright and scamper off.

A strike which contained 30% of his full power... such a blow would threaten even Eternal Emperors to a certain extent, much less ordinary Daolords.

“That Dao-seal is... a bit ridiculous.” Prince Greatjoy was stunned.

“Are you sure you are the Imperial, not him?” Firesurge glanced at Skykfire Brightshore.

“That’s just...” Skyfire Brightshore mumbled...

“Our Heartforce Palace is different from your palaces. We have very few members, and so we truly treat every member as we would family. I naturally was given a few protective measures for this adventure.” Heartlord Solewind smiled. “A pity. I only was given two Dao-seals of this level of power.”

“You have another one?!” All four of the others were starting to grow jealous. It seemed as though the old saying, ‘less is more’, really was true. The Heartforce Palace had very few members, which was why it was

incredibly kind to those few members it had.

Prince Greatjoy glanced sideways at the seated, lifeless corpse of the black-robed Daolord. The black-robed Daolord had a look of utter terror on his face, and his mouth was open. Clearly, death had descended upon him with incredible speed. He had died while still gripped by astonishment.

Chapter 15: The Secret of the Sacred Immortal Realm

Heartlord Solewind stared at the black-robed Daolord's corpse, then said, "This Daolord was quite extraordinary. He was most likely the second and final Daolord here in the Sacred Immortal Realm. Now that he's dead, we'll probably be able to leave this place soon! It is possible that his master, Emperor Trisilk, might have some unique methods which would alert him of his disciple's death. He might be heading towards this place right now. Once he arrives, we'll truly be doomed. We need to get out of here as soon as possible."

Ning and the others all nodded.

The Palace of the Heart might've given Solewind a powerful protective Dao-seal, but it wouldn't be enough to kill an Eternal Emperor; at most, it would just tie him down for a period of time. Even if the Palace Lord was personally present, it would be quite difficult for him to actually slay an Eternal Emperor.

"I'll collect the corpse for now. After we escape from the Sacred Immortal Realm, we can bind his storage treasures and split those things up," Solewind said.

"No!" Prince Greatjoy immediately argued, "Solewind, you used a life-saving Dao-seal to kill him. All the treasures will naturally belong to you. You used up a Dao-seal that represented 30% of a maximum-power strike from the Palace Lord of the Heartforce Palace! I imagine we could sell off all of this Daolord's items, and it still wouldn't be worth as much as that Dao-seal was. Even if you took everything, you are still coming out behind."

Solewind was speechless.

"Right, Solewind." Skyfire Brightshore said the same thing. "We're certainly not going to take advantage of you like this. We can split up the treasures we earned from killing that weak Daolord of the First Step, but

that golem and this black-robed Daolord's treasures shall belong to Darknorth and yourself, respectively. You used up an extremely powerful Dao-seal, while brother Darknorth had to use up that favor from his helper."

"These two affairs aren't comparable. Brother Darknorth captured that golem, but there's no way we could possibly split it up. The Daolord's treasures, however, are useful for everyone," Solewind argued.

"Unnecessary."

"Stop quibbling."

"We're not taking it, and there's nothing you can do to convince us otherwise."

Ning and the others all laughed as they rejected Solewind's suggestions. They had known each other for thousands of years by now, and all of them were quite friendly with each other. Of the find, Solewind was the most logical and the most trustworthy.

Solewind shook his head, then said with resignation, "Fine, then. I'll be shameless and accept it all. Oh, right. This Prismatic Kiloleaf Flower is pretty much at full maturity as well. Let's harvest it. I'll take all of the black-robed Daolord's treasures, but we can split up the value of the flower later."

"Agreed."

"Harvest it first."

Waterlord Firesurge waved his hand. Instantly, a stream of water surged out and formed a giant hand that gently cupped the distant, beautiful flower, then plucked it all at once.

"Come, let us keep on exploring," Prince Greatjoy said. "We still have yet to find the core of this formation."

"We have to breach the formation. Only then will we be able to leave this Sacred Immortal Realm."

Ning and the other five quickly began to advance once more. There

would be plenty of time for them to split up the treasures later. Right now, every extra second they spent in this Sacred Immortal Realm was another second of danger for them! Who knew when Emperor Trisilk would come back? Although logically speaking the Sacred Immortal Realm had that enormous formation which completely separated it from the outside world, which meant Emperor Trisilk shouldn't be aware of the black-robed Daolord's death, in the end it was the Eternal Emperor himself who had set up this formation. He might've put in certain mechanisms that would let him know about what was happening in the Sacred Immortal Realm.

He was an Eternal Emperor. Even if he was very far away, it probably wouldn't take him that long to hasten to the Sacred Immortal Realm. If the five of them were caught here, they really would be finished.

"Hurry up."

"Let's move."

There were no further barriers in front of them. The planting grounds for the flower had essentially been the most important place in the entire estate, after all. They pushed open the enormous stone door in front of them, only to see a circular hallway behind it. The hallway was filled with complicated formations made from divine runes, and Immortal energy flowed through the runes with incredible power. More than ten thousand strange types of stones were present as well.

Some of the stones were jewel-like, some were white and slick, some were dark and gloomy, while some emanated auras of incredible cold. All sorts of different, strange stones were scattered throughout this place.

"We're rich!" Prince Greatjoy's eyes bulged out.

"So many treasures?!" Solewind swept the room with his gaze.

"All combined, these stones have to be worth at least ten million cubes!" Ning was shocked by the implications of this.

Good heavens. Ten million cubes? This was an absolutely enormous sum of money, even for a Verge-level Daolord... but these stones were merely being used to power this formation.

“We’ll split up these treasures into five portions. Each of us will get a portion,” Solewind said.

“Ahaha, alright! We’ll be shameless enough to accept that suggestion.”

“Right, right.”

Greatjoy and Ji Ning didn’t decline either.

In truth, all of them felt rather puzzled and suspicious. From what the black-robed Daolord had said, this formation was personally set up by that Eternal Emperor, who had ordered the black-robed Daolord to protect this place! What secrets did this place hold, for the Eternal Emperor to order such a powerful Daolord to stay here permanently? Why did he pay such an enormous price and personally set up such a complicated formation here?

“No one is in command of the formation, and the formation’s core is the weakest part of any formation. It’ll be easy to break it apart. Don’t move, everyone. Let me deal with it,” Solewind said.

Although no one was in command of the formation, it still took someone at the Daolord level of power to break it.

Solewind carefully picked up one precious stone after another. After carefully picking up a total of twelve stones, the power of the formation began to fade. Solewind grinned. “Next... you can do whatever you like. This formation is no longer able to fight back against us.”

“Right.”

“Let’s do this.”

Ning and the others all worked in concert, each of them collecting roughly a fifth of the total number of treasures present. With the treasures all collected, the formation naturally broke apart.

“The formation is done for. We can leave now.” Prince Greatjoy revealed a look of delight. “However... we still haven’t discovered what secrets this place is holding, for an Eternal Emperor to set both formations and guards over this place.”

“There are no other passageways from this estate,” Solewind said. “The mysteries don’t matter. Let’s leave first.”

“Agreed.”

There really were no other passageways for them to take. They had gone as deep as they could into the estate, and they had already discovered the core of formation at the bottommost layer of the estate.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!

Ning and the others moved incredibly fast. In just a single breath’s worth of time, they flew out of the estate. There were no longer any barriers here to slow them down.

“Eh?” Ning and the others raised their heads to stare at the skies. Their faces all turned pale. “Not good.” All of them felt shocked.

The formation-barrier covering the entire Sacred Immortal Realm had already broken down, revealing the world beyond. Outside the Sacred Immortal Realm was an endless sea of blazing, roiling energy. There were also enormous blazing stones that was flying through the skies. In short, it was an absolutely apocalyptic hell of fire.

The barrier had completely blocked off the outside world, but it had also protected the Sacred Immortal Realm. Now that the formation had been cancelled out, the borders of the Sacred Immortal Realm actually began to collapse as the blazing flames of the inferno surrounding it descended.

“The Sacred Immortal Realm is about to break apart.”

“Let us give those mortals a hand.”

Ning and the others could immediately tell that there was no way they could save the Sacred Immortal Realm. They immediately began to teleport to the places where the cultivators were gathered.

Just a short while ago, the cultivators had been released from their nightmare and regained their freedom. They were planning out how to establish a home for themselves when all of a sudden, something terrifying had appeared in the skies. Endless, flowing streams of blazing

energy began to sweep downwards towards them. All of them knew that they were going to die.

They could only watch as the fires of hell began to descend towards them. There was no way they could fight back at all.

“Get in here.” Ning appeared out of nowhere, then waved his hand and caused more than ten million cultivators to be drawn into his estate-treasure.

“Come here.” Heartlord Solewind appeared in another part of the world, rescuing the utterly terrified and despairing cultivators.

In just two breath’s worth of time, all of the cultivators in the entire continent had been rescued by Ning’s group of five.

Rumble...

The blazing streams of fire and the flaming boulders came crashing downwards. Each time they struck against the Sacred Immortal Realm, the entire continent would tremble and shake. The entire continent began to break and crumble apart into multiple pieces. It was completely disintegrating.

Ning and the others were all extraordinarily powerful. The power of the apocalyptic flames was enough to ruin this realm, but it wasn’t enough to harm them.

They just stood there in the air, surrounded by the Yin-Yang Sword Domain which stretched off ten thousand kilometers. The blazing streams of energy and the flaming boulders were immediately destroyed once they moved close to the group.

“The continent is finished.” After rescuing the mortal cultivators, Ning and the others just watched and sighed.

“Quick, over there!” Prince Greatjoy’s face changed as he pointed towards part of the Daolord’s estate. Now that the entire continent had broken apart, they were able to see something which had been hidden at the very bottom of the continent. There, they could see an enormous levitating mountain that was formed out of fiery rocks. The peak of the

mountain was roughly a million kilometers in size, and there were strange spatial ripples covering it.

“An entire mountain of darkspace flamestone?” Ning and the others were completely stunned.

Chapter 16: Emperor Trisilk

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!

Ji Ning and the rest of the five all immediately teleported closer towards that fiery-red mountain.

The entire place was filled with blazing streams of energy, but they weren't nearly as dangerous to Ning and the others as the spatial tempests around the Mortal Realm had been. Despite the harsh environment, Ning and the others were actually able to engage in spatial teleportation here.

"Am I seeing this? Is this actually an entire mountain of darkspace flamestone?" Prince Greatjoy raised his head to stare at the towering mountain, unable to maintain his usual calm. A stunned look was on his face. "Am I asleep? Am I dreaming...?"

"An entire freaking mountain? Completely comprised of darkspace flamestone?" Solewind was dazed as well.

"By my calculations... every ten thousand kilograms of that mountain can be refined into one kilogram of pure darkspace flamestone." Ning mumbled to himself, "The entire mountain stretches out to cover more than a million kilometers. How much darkspace flamestone is that? How much is it worth? I can't... I can't even calculate..."

"Insane. Absolutely insane!" Firesurge and Skyfire were both stunned as well.

This was an incalculably valuable treasury, one which Eternal Emperors go berserk over!

Darkspace flamestone was an extremely valuable type of mineral which could be used in many different ways. It could be used to forge golems and magic treasures, and there were even certain secret arts and divine abilities that made use of it. Generally speaking, it could be discovered in certain unique environments, but it was generally discovered in meter-sized amounts or even less.

An entire mountain that was over a million kilometers in size? This was

a veritable quarry of darkspace flamestone! In fact, Ning and the others suspected this of being the largest deposit of darkspace flamestone in this entire alternate universe!

But of course, the primordial chaos often gave birth to many types of unique treasures. In the Endless Territories, the Brightshore Kingdom had taken sole ownership over Hydragon Mountain. Although the quality of ore was inferior to the darkspace flamestone here, the total amount of ore it possessed was a million times greater, making Hydragon Mountain far more valuable than this one.

Still... no matter what, this was an enormous mountain with more than a million kilometers of darkspace flamestone. Most likely, only Hegemon-level figures would be qualified to own such a place without fearing that others would seek to seize it. Generally speaking, Eternal Emperors who discovered such a fortune would mine in secret. They simply weren't strong enough to openly claim sole ownership over such a fortune.

"No wonder. No wonder Emperor Trisilk sent his disciple to stand guard over this place," Solewind mumbled. "No wonder he was willing to attack us, even though he knew that we all had extraordinary backgrounds. They really can't risk letting the secret of this mountain get out."

Bang! Bang! Bang! A deep sound rang out. Skyfire Brightshore had picked up an axe-shaped treasure and was using it to hack away at the mountain in front of him. Alas, he was only able to leave a few white marks behind on the fiery ore.

"Can't hack it apart." Skyfire blinked a few times as he muttered softly to himself.

"Wake up, guys! Wake up!" When Ning heard Skyfire mumble those words, he shivered then began to call out to them.

The other four stared at Ning.

"Stop daydreaming. This is an entire mountain of darkspace flamestone. We can't even cut into it, much less mine it." Ning shook his head. "I'd imagine only Daolords of the Third Step would be strong enough to just barely excavate some of the ore, and only at a very slow speed at that. This

entire mountain is a million kilometers in size, and there's no way for us to teleport it away. There's nothing we can do at all."

They all understood. There was literally nothing they could do.

Forget about them; not even Eternal Emperors or the almighty Hegemon would be able to do anything to such a vast mountain of precious minerals! Thus, Emperor Trisilk had elected to send a powerful Daolord and golems here to slowly mine away at the ore.

Every single piece of ore was a priceless treasure. A mountain of ore which was a million kilometers in size naturally was filled with certain arcane powers. In fact, it was being reinforced by some of the prime essences of this entire alternate universe. If you wished to move it by just a few kilometers... most likely, there were incredibly few figures in this entire alternate universe who would be capable of such a thing. To store it away into an estate-world? Completely impossible.

Think about Hydragon Mountain. The almighty Hegemon was incredibly skilled in the Dao of Spacetime, but even he was forced to resort to sending subordinates to slowly mine away at the ore.

"What should we do?" Skyfire Brightshore stared at Ning and the other three.

"We can only look, not touch." Ning shook his head.

"There really is nothing we can do." Solewind shook his head as well.

"All we can do is stare. And drool." Firesurge licked his lips.

"At least we had the chance to see such a mountain of ore," Prince Greatjoy said.

The five of them just stared at that mountain, their gazes blazing with lust. They were like five ordinary mortals who encountered an enormous mountain that was completely made out of gold. Although there was no way to move it, just staring at it was still a stunning experience.

"Let's go," Greatjoy said. "If we waste too much time and end up being caught by Emperor Trisilk, we'll be in trouble."

“Let’s go.”

“In the end, this isn’t something which we are qualified to own.”

Ning and the others were all men of talent. Although they were temporarily stunned by this sight for a time, they quickly came to the decision to leave.

Whoosh. Prince Greatjoy took control over their flying vessel, and they left this place at high speed.

If you wanted to take possession over such an inconceivably valuable place, you had to have the corresponding level of power! If you weren’t strong enough, then you would have to do what Emperor Trisilk did; secretly mine away without anyone knowing about it.

The almighty Hegemon was a good example. The first to discover Hydragon Mountain wasn’t actually him, it was a group of adventuring World-level cultivators. In the end, there had been a grand battle, resulting in the almighty Hegemon taking sole ownership over Hydragon Mountain.

The Church of Annihilation, in turn, had taken completely control over this entire alternate universe, becoming its paramount power.

In the end, power was what mattered the most!

Ning and the others advanced at maximum speed, relying on Prince Greatjoy’s mastery over spacetime to flee as fast as they could.

However... this time, their guess was wrong. Right now, Emperor Trisilk was in no mood to search for them.

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Deep within another part of the Archaeus region.

Rumble...

Space was in chaos here, and spacetime itself trembled.

This was an extremely inhospitable environment. Not even major powers would come here, but a translucent, virtually invisible drop of water was floating through this region of chaotic spacetime.

Within that drop of water, there was an estate.

“Shit, shit.” A sinister-looking youth with nine malignant tumors on the top of his head was seated in the lotus position, grinding his teeth. “That old bastard Maniseal really is like a ghost that just won’t go away. It’s been nearly nineteen chaos cycles, but he’s still chasing after me. Is he never going to get tired of this? Shit, shit, shit! I really regret pissing him off. Who would’ve imagined that the silent old fellow would be this powerful? If I knew, I would never have pissed him off. If it wasn’t for the fact that I, Trisilk, am skilled at staying alive, I would’ve died by his hands long ago.”

He truly felt regret.

Emperor Trisilk was consumed with regret. He was a lawless figure who had committed countless sins. He was willing to do anything if it meant growing more powerful!

Emperor Maniseal was an extremely low-key Eternal Emperor. He was known as a very good man who spent all his time training his disciples within his own territory. He was often taken advantage of by others in the Church of Annihilation, but he didn’t really care too much. Emperor Trisilk had thought Emperor Maniseal to be a complete pushover, and so when he heard that Emperor Maniseal had bestowed an incredibly valuable treasure known as the Violetbolt of Icy Flames to his second disciple, Trisilk had decided to take it. He had slain Emperor Maniseal’s beloved second disciple, then stolen the Violetbolt of Icy Flames.

This was a treasure that was used to meditate on the Dao. When you kept it by your side, your heart and mind would become extremely calm, making it much easier and faster for you to comprehend the Dao.

One of the reasons why Emperor Maniseal had been able to succeed in his Daomerge was because of this treasure! His second disciple was a Verge-level Daolord as well, and so he had chosen to give his disciple this treasure. Who would’ve thought that it would end up in that disciple being killed?

He had been enraged. For the first time in many years, Emperor Maniseal had been truly enraged!

His second disciple was the disciple he loved the most. His eldest disciple had long ago perished while adventuring, which meant his second disciple had been by his side the longest. He treated this second disciple as he would a son. Emperor Maniseal spared no expense to investigate the matter, in the end discovering that it had been Emperor Trisilk who had been the culprit! Emperor Trisilk had been too arrogant, feeling that Emperor Maniseal would not pose any threat to him. Otherwise, he wouldn't have been discovered to be the culprit with such ease.

Once Emperor Maniseal discovered who the murderer was, he left his home and began to chase after Emperor Trisilk.

This chase...

Stunned this entire alternate universe! Only now did they understand how terrifyingly strong Emperor Maniseal was. He was close to being on par with the sixteen Starkings! If he was just a tiny bit stronger, he probably would've been bestowed with the formal title of 'Starking' by the Church of Annihilation.

With such a powerful figure pursuing him, Emperor Trisilk was forced to use up two of his most valuable life-saving treasures. He had even tossed the Violetbolt of Icy Flames over to Emperor Maniseal and asked other major powers to intercede on his behalf, but it was all to no avail. The kindly, good-natured Emperor Maniseal had been truly enraged. He had chased after Emperor Trisilk for nineteen entire chaos cycles, and he still continued the chase without relenting in the slightest.

"Ten chaos cycles, a hundred chaos cycles, or a thousand chaos cycles... so long as I, Maniseal, am still alive, I swear I shall one day slay Trisilk." These were the words which Emperor Maniseal had said long ago.

All Emperor Trisilk could do was hide as best he could.

The universe was a vast place. If an Eternal Emperor wished to hide, it would be very difficult for anyone to find him. However... by the same principle, for a major power like Emperor Maniseal to unrelentingly search for and chase after you was an utter nightmare.

"What horrible luck. Even my mountain of darkspace flamestone was

discovered?” Emperor Trisilk muttered angrily to himself. He could sense his disciple’s death, but he didn’t dare to go and investigate what had happened. “My disciple had the power of a peak Daolord of the Third Step. With my formation supporting him, not even Verge-level Daolords would be a match for him. I wonder who killed him? Maybe that old bastard Maniseal knows about it as well.”

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Ning and the others, however, didn’t know any of this. Terrified of being discovered, they quickly moved towards the core parts of the Archaeus region.

“Do you think Emperor Trisilk will be able to invert the flows of spacetime to find our tracks?”

“Don’t worry. The Archaeus region is huge! It won’t be that easy for him to find us.” Ning and the others didn’t dare to relax in the slightest... but they had no idea that Emperor Trisilk was in no position to worry about anything besides keeping himself alive.

Chapter 17: A Group of Eight

After leaving the Sacred Immortal Realm, Ji Ning and the others spent three hundred years in flight. Only after they felt that had fled a sufficiently long distance did they begin to divide up their loot.

A flying vessel was lazily drifting through the void of the Archaeus region. Ning and the rest of the five were seated within the vessel, counting their earnings.

“That weak Daolord actually had quite a few treasures, including two Prismatic Kiloleaf Flowers. If we add those two to the one which we harvested, that means we have three! He also had an Archaeus medallion as well as these other treasures...” Heartlord Solewind had placed the many treasures he had found across the deck of the vessel.

“That’s quite a lot.”

“Ahaha! That weak Daolord certainly had quite a lot of treasures.” Ning and the others were all pleasantly surprised by this. What they didn’t realize was that the stooped, green-robed Daolord had been assigned all of the more taxing tasks, such as tormenting the cultivators and taking care of the flowers. The actual planting and nurturing of a Prismatic Kiloleaf Flower was an extremely exhausting job, and each time a flower grew to maturity he would head over and harvest it. Although the harvested flowers were temporarily left with him, once their group left the Sacred Immortal Realm he would’ve had to hand it over to the black-robed Daolord.

“How should we split these things up?” Skyfire Brightshore asked hurriedly.

“You are an honorable prince of the Brightshore Imperials. Why are you trying to haggle over treasures with commoners like us?” Firesurge teased him.

“How about this? Let’s consider the three flowers as three ‘portions’ of treasures, an Archaeus medallion as one portion, and all of those other treasures as a fifth portion. Each of us will get one portion, and we can

choose as we please,” Heartlord Solewind said.

Ning and the others all nodded.

The stooped Daolord truly did have quite a collection of treasures, including a bit of darkspace flamestone. Although he didn’t have that much of the flamestone, the amount he did have was still worth close to a million cubes of chaos nectar.

“I want the Archaeus medallion,” Prince Greatjoy said.

“I want...” Ning spoke out at the same time, then paused, slightly stunned. He wanted the Archaeus medallion as well! Su Youji had been a master-class Chaos Immortal when she first acquired the legacy of Feixian the Exalted. Feixian the Exalted had been an extremely powerful Daolord, and his legacy was very well-suited for Su Youji. As a result, she now had the power of a supreme Chaos Immortal. This opportunity in the Archaeus region wasn’t to be missed!

If she was given an Archaeus medallion, she would be able to journey alongside the five. She might grow a bit more stronger, in which case she could very well be able to break through to become a Samsara Daolord herself! A Samsara Daolord who knew the secrets arts of Feixian the Exalted would be a terrifyingly strong assistant, and Su Youji herself was actually an extremely talented individual as well.

She had relied on techniques she herself had come up with to reach the apex of the Ancestral Immortal level. She had needed only one further step to reach the World level, and after she joined Ning she had indeed broken through to that level during their adventures within the Allgod Estate! She had been improving at an incredibly fast rate. Although she was inferior to Ning, she was still quite dazzling. Ning naturally was willing to spend time and effort on helping build her up.

“Brother Darknorth, you want it as well?” Prince Greatjoy was startled.

“The two of you really are generous. We’re valuing these medallions at around a million cubes each.” Firesurge chuckled as he picked up a Prismatic Kiloleaf Flower. “I’ll simply choose this pretty little flower.”

“I have no retainers. I’ll choose one of the flowers as well.” Skyfire Brightshore also choose to acquire one of the flowers.

“Darknorth, if you also want an Archaeus medallion, the answer is simple. Give me your portion of the spoils and I’ll give you one of my medallions.” Solewind smiled. “After the black-robed Daolord died, I found two of the medallions on his corpse.”

The black-robed Daolord himself had a medallion, and he had kept another one of them stored inside his storage treasure.

“Alright.” Ning nodded. “Thank you.”

“No need for thanks. I’m not giving it to you, I’m selling it to you for a million cubes,” Solewind said. “Although I have quite a few retainers, there is only one worth me spending time on.”

Ning, Solewind, and Greatjoy each had a few retainers. Firesurge actually did as well, but he didn’t feel any of them had that much potential and so he wasn’t willing to spend much effort on them. As for Skyfire Brightshore... he had originally been a lone wanderer before he was abducted to the Brightshore Kingdom. Even in the kingdom, he was a lonely and solitary figure who had no retainers at all.

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After splitting up the loot, Ning’s group once more continued on their journey.

Within Ning’s estate-world. Su Youji and World God Pillsaint, along with the other World-level retainers, were sparring against each other.

Whoosh. A pair of dazzlingly beautiful wings of fire suddenly appeared behind Su Youji. Light shone from her eyes, causing the muscular World God facing her to grow rather dazed. An indecisive look of struggle appeared on his face, and quite some time passed before he was able to come back to his senses.

“The Flamefairy’s mastery over the arts of charm is growing more and more formidable. I, Qiyang, am full of admiration for you.” The muscular World God hurriedly spoke out in praise.

“You were dazed long enough for her to kill you a hundred times over.”

“The Flamefairy really is incredible.”

The World-level retainers were the ones who Ning had captured during his invasion of their branch of the Bluegrace Sect. They all knew that Flamefairy Su Youji had gained the legacy of Feixian the Exalted, and ever since then she had only become more and more mesmerizing. The charm which she naturally extruded was now so dazzling that weaker World-level cultivators would be uncontrollably smitten by her. Even the stronger cultivators would be dazed for a while then they saw her.

It must be understood that in a life-and-death battle, a single instant of befuddlement which came at a critical moment could result in immediate death.

None of the other supreme World-level cultivators under Ning were a match for Su Youji at all. This was how formidable a powerful legacy could be! But of course, it was also partially due to the fact that Su Youji’s Dao was quite a good match for the Dao of Feixian the Exalted, making it easy for Su Youji to train in her skills.

Because of her alluring charm, all of these World-level cultivators couldn’t help but flock around her. In fact, some of them secretly fantasized about one day becoming Dao-companions with her. Alas, Su Youji was not interested in them at all.

“Youji.” A voice suddenly rang out.

“Master.” A look of pleased surprise appeared on Su Youji’s face as she turned to look, only to see a white-robed Ning appear off in the distance. This was a divine power incarnation of Ning’s.

“Master.” The other World-level retainers all called out respectfully as well, looks of dread appearing on some of their faces. They had seen Ning attack before, and they knew that he was only a completely different level compared to them.

“Follow me,” Ning instructed.

“Yes.” The Flamefairy immediately moved towards Ning, following right

behind him. Soon, the two moved into a copse of trees.

“A great opportunity has come,” Ning said, looking at Su Youji. “If you can grasp it... it could propel you to become a Samsara Daolord.”

“A Samsara Daolord?” Su Youji was stunned. Although she had been improving rapidly in the arts of charm, illusion, and control, she wasn’t even close to becoming a Daolord just yet.

“This opportunity is something which people like us can only hope for, not count on.” Ning waved his hand, causing a dark-red circular disc to appear within it. “This is an Archaeus medallion. Bind it and carry it with you. If you don’t keep it with you, you won’t be able to leave this estate-world. If you tried, you would be crushed to death by the power of the Archaeus region.”

“An Archaeus medallion?” Although Su Youji was puzzled, she felt absolute faith in Ji Ning. She obediently bound the Archaeus medallion, then took it into her possession.

She had no idea what an enormous opportunity this was.

In this alternate universe or in their own universe, even the most talented of geniuses, the ones who could become Samsara Daolords whenever they chose, all dreamed of being able to acquire one of these medallions.

“Alright. Now follow me out,” Ning instructed.

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Ning’s group of five had just become a group of eight! Ji Ning, Greatjoy, and Solewind had each arranged for one retainer to join their group. They were Su Youji the Flamefairy, World Goddess Skywolf, and Chaos Immortal Swallowback.

World Goddess Skywolf was the retainer of Prince Greatjoy. Although her Daoist title was ‘Skywolf’, she was actually an icy, grim woman of incredible beauty who was surrounded by a strong aura of death.

Chaos Immortal Swallowback was the retainer of Solewind and looked

like a young child.

World Goddess Skywolf and Chaos Immortal Swallowback had both reached extremely high levels of insight into the Dao. Both of them could become Daolords whenever they chose, and both were formal members of the Twelve Palaces! Although they hadn't been acknowledged by their respective pagodas, they were still extraordinary figures.

Su Youji was the weakest of the eight, but just like Ning she had only been training for a very brief period of time. She was also the personal disciple of Feixian the Exalted and had tremendous potential.

After the three 'newcomers' joined the squad of five, they all swore oaths not to divulge any information regarding their own universe.

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The estate-world within the Mirrorsnow Painting.

Ning's divine power incarnation descended upon this world, then turned to stare at the muscular golem.

The golem stared at Ning with its blazing eyes as it growled, "You killed Master?"

The black-robed Daolord was its master. As soon as the Daolord had died, the golem had regained its freedom. It naturally understand what this meant.

"Yes." Ning nodded. "Now... are you willing to submit?"

The towering golem gritted its teeth, then knelt down and said respectfully, "Moksha pays his respects to you, Master. Please don't wipe out my mind."

The reason why he previously hadn't been willing to submit was because he felt certain that his master, the black-robed Daolord, would be able to defeat Ji Ning and the others. Now, his original master had perished... and this white-robed youth before him was unquestionably an incredible genius who could easily become a Daolord in the future. By then, the youth could use his Daolord-level energy to bind him by force. In fact, if

Ning was irritated enough he could wipe the golem's mind clean.

Anything which possessed intelligence and sentience, be it a golem or a magic treasure, would not wish for its mind to be wiped clean.

"Alright." Ning revealed a smile. Just like that, he had gained an obedient golem that was the equal of a Daolord of the Third Step.

Chapter 18: The Genesis Lands

Moksha acted very obediently, actively assisting Ji Ning in binding him. Ning couldn't help but secretly sigh to himself. He certainly changed his attitude quite quickly.

When he had been first captured, he had been boastful and held Ning in no regard at all, feeling certain that Ning's group was going to die soon. Now that he realized that his former master had died, he had immediately knelt down and begged, 'Please do not kill me.'

"Master." After being bound, Moksha immediately smiled ingratiatingly at Ning. "There is something I must tell you."

"Speak," Ning said.

"I was instructed by Emperor Trisilk to assist my master in mining ore," Moksha said smugly. "Darkspace flamestone is extremely difficult to mine, but I am extremely strong. Over the course of thirty chaos cycles, I managed to mine quite a bit of ore. For convenience's sake, I stored it all within an estate-treasure which I carried with me as I mined."

Ning's eyes lit up. "Do you still have the darkspace flamestone?" He had been mining for thirty chaos cycles. How much had he mined?!

"I do." Moksha nodded. "However, a good deal of it was taken away by my previous master. I only have on me the ore which I mined in the last nine chaos cycles. Take a look, Master." As Moksha spoke, he waved his hand and caused fist-sized chunks of fiery-red rocks to appear on the ground. Strange spatial ripples began to fill the surrounding area as well.

He waved his hand three times in total, causing the fiery-red rocks to pile up into a small mountain that was three thousand meters tall. By this point in time, space had begun to completely twist and distort, causing shimmering 'curtains' of folded space to appear in the surrounding area. Because the chunks of stone were all fist-sized, it wasn't too hard to store them away in that estate-treasure. If this had been a single massive slab of darkspace flamestone, most likely only an Eternal Emperor would've been able to store it away.

“You mined that much?” Ning’s eyes nearly popped out.

Although golems that were as strong as Daolords of the Third Step were valuable, the amount of ore this particular golem was carrying was even more valuable.

“So much darkspace flamestone...” Ning swept it with his godsense, carefully calculating how much was present. “This has to be worth nearly ten million cubes of chaos nectar!”

“My former master had roughly twice as much as this,” Moksha said. “Early on, I wasn’t that skilled in using axes and so was rather slow in my mining. It took about twenty chaos cycles before I got better, and all of the ore I mined during that period of time I gave to my previous master. This pile here consists of the ore I mined during the past nine chaos cycles.”

“I’m more than satisfied with this.” Ning grinned.

This ore had to be worth nearly ten million cubes of chaos nectar. As for the twenty million cubes which the black-robed Daolord had, that all belonged to Solewind. In order to save them, Solewind had used up a powerful Dao-seal that was so valuable, it would be almost impossible to find on the open market. Ning naturally didn’t feel any jealousy or envy whatsoever. For him to suddenly earn so much darkspace flamestone was already a stroke of tremendous fortune.

“What do you know about Emperor Trisilk?” Ning asked. The five of them still felt worried about this matter.

“Emperor Trisilk has an odd temper and is incredibly savage,” Moksha said. “You must be careful, Master. Based on what I know of the Emperor, he’s the type to avenge every single slight, no matter how petty. Once he locates the five of you... I guarantee he won’t let you off easily.”

“Oh?” A solemn look appeared on Ning’s face as he nodded.

But of course, the two of them had no idea that Emperor Trisilk was currently in a far more miserable situation than they were.

“What about the Genesis Lands? What do you know about that place?” Ning asked.

“The Genesis Lands is where this entire universe sprang from. All combat is forbidden there,” Moksha said. “When I served the Emperor, I once spent a very long period of time in the Genesis Lands.”

Ning asked, “Who issued the order forbidding all combat in that location?”

“The order came from the Church of Annihilation,” Moksha said. “Daolords generally do not dare to violate the commands of the Church. But of course, if someone really does go crazy, they can still choose to break this law. I once saw it happen with my own eyes. A Daolord, for the sake of evading an enemy, chose to hide within the Genesis Lands. However, his enemy was so enraged that he ignored the rules and chased the Daolord into the Genesis Lands, then killed him there! But of course... later on, the killer was wiped out by the Church of Annihilation!”

Ning nodded.

“Still... the Paladins of the Church of Annihilation aren’t afraid to violate this law. They are members of the Church itself, after all. Even when they break this law, they will at most suffer some non-lethal punishments,” Moksha said. “I once heard Master say that if the sixteen Starkings were to violate this law, no punishment would be given. Not even the ruler of the Church of Annihilation would choose to offend and act against his Starkings without a very good reason.”

“Oh.” Ning chuckled. This golem knew quite a bit!

Actually, the almighty Hegemon had given them some information regarding this alternate universe before sending them into it, but the amount of information was pitifully small. All Ning knew was that the Archaeus region was filled with danger, but once they reached the Genesis Lands in the center they would be fairly safe. Although the Genesis Lands held its own dangers, all violence was supposedly prohibited there. Supposedly, there was no need to worry about any World-level cultivators or Daolords you encountered within the Genesis Lands.

Upon hearing the golem speak at length, Ning couldn’t help but sigh.

A ‘prohibition’ against violence?

In the end, there was a limit to how far that prohibition would stretch. Suicidally fearless cultivators would violate that prohibition, as would the Paladins and Starkings of the Church of Annihilation, thanks to the extremely high positions they held within the Church.

“Still... Paladins will be punished if they violate this prohibition. They won’t attack us without a good reason.” Ning nodded slowly. “As for Starkings... I imagine we aren’t even qualified to attract the attention of a Starking, much less offend one.”

“Our entire universe only holds sixteen Starkings, and almost none of them are in the Archaeus region,” Moksha said. “I heard Emperor Trisilk once say that even he himself has only met three Starkings in his lifetime.”

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Moksha had been Emperor Trisilk’s golem for quite some time, and thus knew many of the Emperor’s secrets. He had even been in the Genesis Lands, and thus he was able to give Ning a good deal of information regarding that place.

Time slowly flowed on, and Ning’s group of eight continued their careful advance. The rest of their journey was fairly uneventful, and they did not encounter any more Daolords! In truth, the odds of encountering a Daolord in the Archaeus region were incredibly low to begin with.

By now, they had spent over 8922 years in the Archaeus region, and they had encountered many dangerous situations and locales. Still, in the end they were able to safely reach the Genesis Lands. All eight of them survived this journey.

“The Genesis Lands.”

A flying vessel was soaring through the emptiness of space.

Ning and the rest of the eight were aboard the vessel, and their heads were raised as they stared at an utterly enormous floating world which was in front of them. This was the Genesis Lands! This was the wellspring of this entire alternate universe, from which all things originally arose.

“That aura of power...” Ning and the others were all quite shaken.

An invisible field of power covered the entire Archaeus region. Without an Archaeus medallion, even the likes of Eternal Emperors would be instantly crushed to death! The Archaeus region was almost as large as their homeland, the 'Endless Territories'. It was incredibly vast, and that field of power stretched out to cover every inch of the region.

And yet... the incredibly vast world in front of them was the source of that field of power. One could imagine how much might it contained! Not even someone as powerful as the almighty Hegemon could compare to the might of the Genesis Lands of the Archaeus region.

"Come. Let us enter the Genesis Lands," Ning said.

"Brother Darknorth, you told us earlier that the elementary trial we need to pass in order to enter the Genesis Lands is a trial of resolve, correct?" Greatjoy asked.

"That is what my golem told me. I think he was telling the truth," Ning said.

Not just anyone was permitted to enter the Genesis Lands.

For weaker cultivators, entering the Genesis Lands was an almost impossible task. Any creature which sought to enter the Genesis Lands would first have to pass a trial of resolve. If they were able to endure it, they would be able to freely enter and wander the Genesis Lands. If they failed, they would be knocked unconscious and be teleported away. They would not be qualified to enter this sacred place.

"The trial isn't that tough. Daolords and major schools often send their elite disciples to this place. Almost all of the more talented ones are able to gain entry." Ning could tell that Su Youji, Chaos Immortal Swallowback, and World Goddess Skywolf all looked rather nervous. The three of them were just retainers, after all. Compared to the original five, they were still quite a bit weaker. As a result, they possessed less confidence in their own abilities as well.

"Alright." The Flamefairy nodded.

Whoosh.

The flying vessel advanced at high speeds, flying towards that utterly massive levitating world. Finally, it began to slow down as it drew closer.

A web of venerable, almost sacred power descended from on high, covering Ning and the other eight within its grasp. This web of power was grim and unfeeling, and it possessed no intelligence whatsoever. It was a type of power which the Genesis Lands itself naturally possessed. This place was the Genseis Lands. It was not a place for weak creatures to live in.

Rumble...

Ning could feel something furiously hammer at his soul. However, Ning's soul had been nurtured and strengthened by his azureflower mist energy, making it comparable to the soul of a Daolord of the First Step. He was able to resist the pressure with ease.

Ning turned to glance at the others.

Prince Greatjoy, Solewind, and Firesurge all seemed to be handling the trial with ease, and they all glanced back at him as well, smiles on their faces.

"Eh?" Ning and the others all noticed at the same time that Skyfire Brightshore had an ugly look on his face, and his body was trembling slightly. Although he was blessed with incredible natural gifts and had an extraordinary bloodline, he had experienced very few dangerous encounters in his early life. As a result, his soul and his willpower were all somewhat lacking when compared to that of Ning and the others.

Chapter 19: Universe Treasure

Ji Ning and the other three began to grow nervous. The entire point of this journey was for them to accompany Skyfire Brightshore in an adventure within the Archaeus region. The journey wasn't going to come to a crashing halt because this Brightshore Imperial wasn't even able to enter the Genesis Lands, right? That would be an absolute joke.

"Hm." Ning turned to glance at the other three retainers. Chaos Immortal Swallowback, World Goddess Skywolf, and Flamefairy Su Youji all had fairly relaxed looks on their faces. It seemed as though Swallowback was the most relaxed; he even grinned at Ning and the others. Skywolf and Su Youji, the two women, had fairly unpleasant looks on their faces, and their bodies were shaking slightly. Still, it seemed as though they would be able to endure it.

A long period of time passed.

That exalted web of power continued to fill every inch of this world, but it no longer launched any attacks against them.

"Whew." Skyfire Brightshore let out a sigh of relief, and World Goddess Skywolf and Su Youji all looked slightly more relaxed as well.

"That was embarrassing. I was damn near flattened." Skyfire Brightshore shook his head and laughed. He was born at the World God level of power, and he had been a solitary figure for much of his early life. In fact, shortly after he was born he had been abducted by the almighty Hegemon. As a result, his soul and his willpower were both very weak compared to that of the other five. The only reason he had been able to survive this trial was because of his innate gifts.

Every single member of his race was blessed with extraordinary powers from birth. His soul was already as strong as that of a Daolord's, and so although he possessed much weaker willpower than Ning and the others, he was still able to endure the trial and overcome it.

"All eight of us will be granted entry. This is something to celebrate." Prince Greatjoy smiled.

“Not bad.” Ning glanced at Su Youji and offered her a few words of praise.

“Master, I feel fortunate that I’ve spent these past few years meditating on the techniques of my master, Feixian the Exalted, within your estate-world. I’ve improved quite a bit with regards to my willpower and my mental strength. Otherwise, I wouldn’t have been able to survive that,” Su Youji sent mentally.

Ning nodded. Su Youji’s path was a path of charm and control. This was naturally a path that required an extremely powerful mind.

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The flying vessel flew deeper into the world of the Genesis Lands.

This was a world of truly incredible proportions. It was trillions of kilometers in size, and it seemed almost endless.

“How vast.” Su Youji sighed in amazement as she stared at the world.

“This is the place which gave birth to this entire universe.” Ning stared at their surroundings as well. He could sense that certain locations within this world were filled with auras of incredible power that only strengthened as they flew closer.

“Quick, look over there!” Prince Greatjoy pointed off into the distance.

“Eh?!” Ning and the others looked towards the direction in which he was pointing, only to see a powerful expert seated in the lotus position atop a golden carpet. This expert had a single horn on his head and was covered with dark-red scales, while the golden carpet was covered with many delicacies and wine. The man was drinking wine and devouring his food while casually glancing at his surroundings.

“Hey there, kiddos!” The horned expert suddenly noticed Ning’s group, and he immediately called out to them while flying towards them.

Ning’s group didn’t try to avoid him, as they knew that all combat was forbidden within the Genesis Lands. Many of the disciples of the mightiest major powers of this alternate universe had all gathered here within this

place! It might be rare for them to encounter their peers in the other parts of the Archaeus region, but that was because they were all gathered here within the Genesis Lands. There were quite a few Daolords in seclusion here as well!

As a result, the Genesis Lands held many Daolords as well as quite a few World-level cultivators. If it wasn't for the law against combat, the World-level cultivators would've been wiped out long ago.

"New arrivals?" The horned expert grinned merrily as he landed aboard their flying vessel.

"Greetings, senior." Ning and the others bowed respectfully.

"Able to enter the Genesis Lands despite merely being at the World level. Not bad at all!" The horned expert grinned as he praised them. "I was only able to come to this place after I became a Daolord. Come, come! Bring me your finest wine and your best food and let me have a taste. In exchange, I, Owl bath, shall impart unto you some of the rules and secrets regarding the Genesis Lands."

"Please be welcome, senior."

"Please have a taste, senior."

Ning and the others all hurriedly took out all sorts of fine food and wine.

"Not bad at all. Glug, glug. Hey, this wine is pretty good too. Can I have some more?" The horned expert didn't just eat and drink, he even stashed some of the food away for later without seeming to feel the slightest bit embarrassed.

The horned expert burped, then chortled merrily with half-lidded eyes. "Don't worry, I'm not going to eat all of your food for nothing. The Genesis Lands is an enormous place. If you just run around randomly, you may very well end up dying here."

Ning and the others listened silently, the very picture of innocent obedience.

"The Genesis Lands can be roughly divided into two parts; the 'outer

reaches' and the 'inner reaches'. The true name of the 'inner region' is actually the Prime Reaches, and it holds the innermost core and prime essences of this entire universe. There are many deceased ancient powers located within the Prime Reaches, and it is the most important location in our entire universe." The horned expert said casually, "Every single cultivator would dream of being able to enter the Prime Reaches of the Genseis Lands. The Prime Reaches are located at the very center, and you'll be able to recognize it as soon as you see it." Glug, glug, glug. He raised his head and drank several more mouthfuls of wine.

Ning and the others all nodded. Actually, they knew all of this already! Moksha the golem had told Ning long ago about this.

"Every single World-level cultivator capable of entering the Genesis Lands is a genius," the horned expert said. "But perhaps just one in a hundred of them are capable of entering the inner reaches!"

Ning and the others were stunned. Just one in a hundred? This was their first time hearing this number. Generally speaking, the World-level cultivators who were able to enter this place were all capable of becoming Daolords whenever they chose! Who would've thought that entering the inner reaches would be this difficult?

"But the outer reaches aren't a bad place to be either. The outer reaches were formed when the universe itself was born, and it contains many mysterious places and many hidden fortunes," the horned expert said. "I myself stay out here in the outer reaches. Alas... while one in a hundred World-level cultivators are able to enter the inner reaches, things are much worse for us Daolords. Perhaps just one in ten thousand Daolords are able to enter the inner reaches!"

"The outer reaches are filled with treasures, but the inner reaches are absolutely incredible. Almost all of the Eternal Emperors will venture into the inner reaches in search of treasures." A mysterious look suddenly flashed through the horned expert's eyes. "Have you heard? Shortly after the master of the Church of Annihilation became an Eternal Emperor, he entered the inner reaches... and then, for some reason, he became terrifyingly strong, strong enough to unify our entire universe and force all

the major powers in it to submit to him.”

“Oh?” Ning and the others were growing increasingly curious.

Almost all the Eternal Emperors would enter the place? It was the Prime Reaches which gave the master of the Church of Annihilation his incredible power, allowing him to unify this universe?

“Everyone says that the Prime Reaches are filled with endless possibilities. Just three chaos cycles ago, a Daolord managed to acquire a Universe treasure within the Prime Reaches,” the horned expert said in a mysterious manner.

“A Universe treasure?” Solewind and Skyfire were both shocked. As for Greatjoy and Ning, they revealed puzzled looks.

What exactly was a Universe treasure?

Upon seeing this, the horned expert grinned. “It seems as though some of you, my young friends, haven’t heard this phrase before. Actually, even I only heard of these treasures after entering the Genesis Lands. Eternal treasures are powerful, but above them... there is a legendary rank of supremely powerful treasures which are known as Universe treasures. They are often also referred to as Supreme treasures. These are truly incredible treasures which even Eternal Emperors would go wild over. They are incredibly powerful, and they are incredibly mysterious.”

“Alas.” The horned expert shook his head. “Universe treasures are truly supreme treasures; there’s no way you can bind them by force! You can only bind a Universe treasure if the treasure itself acknowledges you.”

Ning, Greatjoy, and the others were all rather stunned.

At this moment, Heartlord Solewind sent mentally to them, “Darknorth, Greatjoy, Firesurge... Universe treasures are legendary things that are filled with inconceivable amounts of power. They truly are the most supreme of treasures, and they are both incredibly rare and incredibly valuable. Even Eternal Emperors would drool over the chance to acquire such treasures! Treasures like them can only be hoped for, not actively sought out. Right... Darknorth, your Sword Palace actually holds a Universe

treasure known as the ‘Shardsword’.”

“Shardsword?” Ning was stunned. He remembered now; the first time he entered the Sword Palace, when he entered the Armaments Gorge he had encountered a ‘broken’ shard of a sword that had no price tag and which he couldn’t even move towards.

Ning still remembered how he had asked the overseers of the Armaments Groge, Swordfive and Swordsix, about that strange sword. Their response had been to tell them that it was clear the sword and Ning were not fated to be together, and that even the two previous Palace Lords of the Sword Palace had not been able to receive the acknowledgment of that sword. Ever since the Shardsword’s original owner had died, the Shardsword had been silent and accepted no others.

“So that ‘broken’ sword was actually a Universe treasure. No wonder not even the two Palace Lords of the Sword Palace were able to receive its acknowledgment,” Ning mused to himself.

“Senior, are there Universe treasures within the Prime Reaches?” Solewind couldn’t help but ask.

“There are.” But the horned expert then shook his head. “According to the history books, over the course of countless years there has been a total of eight Universe treasures who acknowledged the major powers who found them and were willing to follow them out of the Genesis Lands! Supposedly, even more Universe treasures are hidden within the Prime Reaches. To be honest, though... Universe treasures don’t really matter that much. The thing which really drives all the cultivators crazy is the mystery behind the process by which the master of the Church of Annihilation gained such incredible power... but of course, those are the affairs of the most supreme cultivators of our universe. You World-level cultivators don’t need to worry too much about those matters. You aren’t strong enough to get involved just yet.”

“Still. The Prime Reaches truly are a mysterious place. I’ve never been there before myself, and I imagine none of the eight of you will be able to enter either,” the horned expert said.

Chapter 20: Emperor Maniseal

“The eight of you will probably stay in the outer reaches as well,” the horned cultivator said. “I’ll tell you a bit about some of the taboos in the outer reaches. The danger in the outer reaches primarily comes from certain mysterious locations.”

The horned expert began to introduce various things they had to look out for as well as describe some of the more famous danger zones. Generally speaking, the places with the most opportunities were also the places with the most danger!

His narration went on for two full hours.

“Now, let’s speak of cultivators,” the horned expert said. “In the outer reaches, there are many Daolords who reside in seclusion, as well as quite a few World-level cultivators like yourselves who are seeking great fortunes. There’s no need for you to worry too much about these people, so long as you avoid offending the most powerful Daolords. Generally speaking, no one will dare to attack in this place.”

Ning and the others all nodded.

“The ones you really need to look out for are the two Eternal Emperors who live in seclusion in the outer reaches,” the horned expert said. “If you irritate them, you’ll be in serious trouble. Even if they kill you, at most they will be given some light punishment by the Church of Annihilation.”

“One of the two Eternal Emperors is named Emperor Northtree,” the horned expert said. “The other is named Emperor Maniseal.”

“Emperor Northtree isn’t that worrisome. He probably won’t attack for no reason. Emperor Maniseal, though... you really don’t want to piss him off.” A look of worry could be seen in the horned expert’s eyes. “These days, Emperor Maniseal might start a massacre at the drop of a hat, and even if he did the Church of Annihilation wouldn’t really do anything to him. I’ve heard that even the master of the church is trying to befriend him.”

“Befriend him?” Ning and the others were puzzled.

“Emperor Maniseal used to be a very low-key Eternal Emperor, but that arrogant madman Emperor Trisilk killed his beloved disciple. This truly enraged him... eheh.” The horned expert shook his head and sighed.

Ning, Greatjoy, Solewind, Firesurge, and Skyfire felt their hearts clench.

Emperor Trisilk? They had been worrying about him attacking them for quite some time now.

“Enraged, Emperor Maniseal began to chase after and hunt down Emperor Trisilk.” The horned expert sighed in true amazement. “The power he displayed was enough to shock everyone in this universe. He was far more powerful than most Eternal Emperors, while Emperor Trisilk had a terrible reputation and had offended many major powers but had been able to survive due to his top-notch survival skills. And yet... Emperor Maniseal has been chasing after him relentlessly, forcing him to flee nonstop. Emperor Trisilk no longer dares to show his face anywhere.”

Ning and the others all secretly let out sighs of relief. Wonderful. Well done! The more difficult Emperor Trisilk’s straits were, the safer they would be.

“Emperor Maniseal is most skilled in the Dao of Seals,” the horned expert is. Right now, a Dao-seal clone of his currently lives within the outer reaches.”

“A Dao-seal clone?” Ning and the others were puzzled.

“A clone created from a single Dao-seal,” the horned expert said. “Supposedly, it has 80% of the power of his true body! And he has nine of these Dao-seal clones!”

“What?!” Ning and the others could hardly believe it. How could Dao-seal clones be this strong?

It must be understood that the likes of Daolord Badlands or Daolord Solesky had to spend enormous amounts of treasure and effort in order to create a powerful avatar, and they could only really have one at a time! This was true in both the Endless Territories and in this universe.

The Dao-seal clones which Emperor Maniseal had created were simply ridiculous.

“This is a special secret art which only he possesses and only he can use. Not even his disciples have been taught this technique,” the horned expert said. “It is probably a secret art he came up with after he became an Eternal Empror. He’s reached an unfathomably deep level of skill in his Dao of Seals, and has been publicly acknowledged as the number one master of this Dao in the Church of Annihilation! It is precisely due to his unfathomable mastery of this Dao that the master of the Church of Annihilation supposedly wants to befriend him.”

“He’s currently boiling with rage and the desire to kill right now, and the leaders of the Church of Annihilation are all trying to befriend him. Thus... even if he does kill a few World-level cultivators, no one will be willing to offend him over it.” The horned expert pointed off into the distance. “Look. That place over there? The tallest peak on that levitating mountain? That’s where one of his Dao-seal bodies currently resides.”

Ning and the others all turned to stare. Roughly ten billion kilometers away from them, there was indeed a levitating ountain peak that emanated ripples of tremendous power. Ning and the others all felt reverence towards this man. He had reached such a level of skill in his craft that he was acknowledged as being the ultimate expert in this entire universe in the Dao of Seals. Most likely, the reason he had been such a low-key figure in the past was precisely because he was completely focused on analyzing Dao-seals.

Ning and the others felt gratitude towards him. His pursuit of Emperor Trisilk ensured that they would have nothing more to worry about.

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Within a floating mountain. Inside an ordinary estate.

“Hmph.”

Emperor Maniseal was dressed in deep blue Daoist robes and wore a crown on his head. His face was thin and long, while his eyes were quite narrow. He loked very unpleasant right now.

A youth was kneeling before him. “Master, I went to beg the White Emperor for assistance. The White Emperor said that if you were willing to hand over eight of your ‘Lifeblood’ Dao-seals, he would guarantee that he would be able to convince the master of the Church of Annihilation to bring our second apprentice-brother back to life.”

“Eight Lifeblood Dao-seals? Hmph. These two... ugh.” Emperor Maniseal might have been a good-tempered man, but he was quaking with rage right now.

The most highly ranked members in the Church of Annihilation were its master and the sixteen Starkings, but there were differences amongst the Starkings as well. Of the sixteen, there were three known as the Primal Starkings who were very special. Supposedly, they had existed ever since this universe had been created.

The White Emperor was one of the three Primal Starkings, and was the teacher of the leader of the Church of Annihilation! However, the leader of the Church of Annihilation had eventually become the most powerful figure in the entire universe, overtaking his master and unifying this entire universe.

“The leader of the Church of Annihilation asked for nine Lifeblood Dao-seals to revive my disciple. As for his master, he asked for just a bit less; ‘just’ eight!” Emperor Maniseal ground his teeth. “These two must have come to a private agreement to rob me blind.”

Lifeblood Dao-seals represented the highest level of expertise which Emperor Maniseal had reached in the Dao of Seals. They possessed inconceivable amounts of power. If you were slain by a foe, you could rely on it to instantly come back to life!

A single Lifeblood Dao-seal represented an extra life!

Over the course of countless years, Emperor Maniseal had used up many treasures via many failed attempts to create these Dao-seals. After all that, he had still created just two of those Lifeblood Dao-seals. Even someone like him, the inventor of these Dao-seals, had a very high chance of failure when creating them. The creation process was simply far too difficult.

He had asked the master of the Church of Annihilation to reverse the flow of spacetime and revive his beloved disciple. He had loved his second disciple as he would a son. He was willing to pay any price!

Alas, the leader of the Church of Annihilation had rejected him outright. “Reverse the flows of spacetime and revive a Verge-level Daolord? Impossible. I’ve never even revived one of my retainers or disciples.”

It had been a clear-cut refusal.

However, Emperor Maniseal had brought out a half-finished version of his Lifeblood Dao-seal. The leader of the Church had been stunned upon seeing it! Given his exalted status, he immediately recognized how valuable this seal was. He immediately changed his tone. “Given how strong I am, only some of the most ancient powers in other universes might pose a threat to me. If you can give me nine of these Lifeblood Dao-seals, I’ll be willing to bear the price necessary to reverse spacetime and save your disciple.”

Nine?

Not only did the creation of these Lifeblood Dao-seals require an enormous amount of treasure, they also took at least three full chaos cycles of time! And... once you made a single mistake, all of the time and wealth you had spent would have gone to waste! Worst of all, creating these Dao-seals required tremendous focus and was extremely tiresome. To stay in such a state for three full chaos cycle, with the results generally being failure... this was just a staggeringly exhausting process.

It had been countless years since he had come up with this idea, but he had only been able to create two of these seals.

“My Lifeblood Dao-seals are equivalent to an extra life. Hmph. The leader of the Church truly is greedy.” Emperor Maniseal ground his teeth. “Let’s wait and see. Sooner or later, he’ll seek me out.”

Emperor Maniseal felt that his Dao-seals were too difficult to create.

As for the leader of the Church, the leader similarly felt that reversing spacetime to revive a Verge-level Daolord was far too difficult. As for

simply killing Emperor Maniseal? That never even came up as a possibility, as the Lifeblood Dao-seal meant that Emperor Maniseal was most likely the toughest person to kill in this universe.

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The flying vessel continued to advance. As for Daolord Owlbat, he continued to eat, drink, and boast. Ning's group simply listened.

"Any art, when improved to the ultimate level, will possess inconceivable power. Emperor Maniseal has reached incredible heights in the Dao of Seals," Daolord Owlbat said. "I heard that of the sixteen Starkings, the White Emperor has reached such heights in the Dao of Metal that you can't even comprehend it."

Ning and the others were happy to hear him talk on and on, and the flying vessel continued to teleport forwards and advance towards the center of the Genesis Lands.

"See that?" Daolord Owlbat pointed off into the distance.

Ning and the others were stunned by what they saw. An incredibly terrifying abyss was in the earth in front of them, and above that abyss hovered a world that was roughly a billion kilometers in size. This world radiated a towering pillar of light that was filled with countless terrifying auras, many of which were comparable to the auras of Eternal Emperors.

Many chains were attached to that levitating world, and the chains themselves were rooted firmly into the land of the outer reaches.

"That right there is the inner reaches! The world which gave birth to the entire universe, and which holds all of its prime essences," Daolord Owlbat said. "There are eight primessence chains which connect it to the outer reaches. What you need to do is walk onto those chains and stride into the inner reaches."

"But of course... if you aren't careful and end up falling into that abyss? Even Daolords of the Fourth Step will be devoured and killed by the abyss, to say nothing of the likes of you!" Daolord Owlbat said.

Chapter 21: The Chains

The flying vessel flew towards one of the primessence chains. There were twelve World-level cultivators seated there in the lotus position. Clearly, they also wished to attempt to pass the primessence chains.

Whoosh. The flying vessel landed.

“Eight more have joined the fray.”

“Looks like we’re making new friends.” The other twelve World-level cultivators who were already present grinned as they got up and moved forward to welcome Ji Ning’s group.

“Fuzhou greets you, fellow Daoists.”

“Warpflame greets you, fellow Daoists.”

The World-level cultivators all came over to greet them, and Ning’s group exchanged a few words of pleasantries with them.

It was quite common for people in the Genesis Lands to chat up unfamiliar faces, as all World-level cultivators who were able to make it into the Genesis Lands of this universe were extraordinary figures with limitless future prospects! In addition, all violence was forbidden here, making it so that they didn’t have to worry about ambushes or sneak attacks. This encouraged people to befriend each other, as perhaps one of these new friends might one day become an unearthly Daolord or perhaps even an Eternal Emperor.

Ning and his group all introduced themselves, making just slight alterations to their true story.

“Fellow Daoists, why haven’t you passed through these chains and entered the Prime Reaches?” Solewind laughed.

“You think we don’t want to? It’s that we aren’t able to.” A withered-looking World-level cultivator immediately shook his head. “The only way to enter the inner reaches from the outer reaches is by passing through one of those primessence chains. If you try to fly over, you’ll be swallowed up and devoured by the abyss. However, the chains themselves are also

quite dangerous. There are special trials for World-level cultivators, and even more difficult trials for Samsara Daolords. Both trials are extremely dangerous, and the closer you get to the inner reaches the more dangerous it shall become.”

“Oh?” Ning and the other seven were quite curious.

“Ah, I forgot to tell you!” Daolord Owl bath was still seated next to them, drinking some wine. He let out a laugh and said, “When you step onto the primessence chains, there will be some wraiths that will begin to attack you. The farther along you go, the more powerful and numerous the wraiths shall be. Right... the primessence chains themselves are also capable of affecting your mind. If you aren’t careful, you might go crazy. If that happens, you’ll be dead for sure.”

“Just so. This senior speaks the truth. Thus... fellow Daoists, once you attempt to traverse the primessence chains, you need to immediately retreat as soon as you feel as though you’ve reached your limit. If you retreat, you’ll still be alive. If you try to force your way through, you’ll probably encounter a sudden danger that you can’t handle which will knock you off the chains. The abyss will swallow you, and your true soul will be wiped out. You’ll definitely die!”

“Better to retreat than to try and force things.”

The twelve all expressed similar sentiments, trying to dissuade the newcomers from rashness.

Daolord Owl bath nodded as well. “If you move slowly and carefully gauge your chances, you’ll have a shot of staying alive. If you try to force things, you’ll be doomed.”

“Thank you, everyone.”

“We understand.” Ning and the others all nodded.

Ning’s group exchanged a round of glances. It seemed they absolutely could not underestimate the deadliness of these primessence chains. Every World-level cultivator able to reach the Genesis Lands was a figure of extraordinary ability, but less than one in a hundred were able to enter the

Prime Reaches. The difficulty of this trial spoke for itself. If you overestimated yourself, you would probably die.

“We’ll give it a shot first. The three of you should wait for now,” Solewind sent mentally. “Greatjoy, Darknorth, Firesurge, Skyfire... I recommend you let me be the first to give it a try. They said that these primessence chains can affect one’s mind, and I feel quite confident in my abilities in this area. As for those so-called wraiths... I’ll definitely move slowly and cautiously.”

“Mm.”

“Alright.” Ning, Greatjoy, and the others all nodded.

Less than one in a hundred World-level cultivators were able to succeed, but Heartlord Solewind was a Heartforce Cultivator who had been acknowledged by the ancient pagodas of the Palace of the Heart. He definitely stood far above the vast majority of cultivators with regards to the power of his mind and heart. Even proud figures like Ning and Greatjoy knew that they were significantly inferior to Solewind in this respect.

.....

The twelve World-level cultivators, Daolord Owl bath, and the other seven all watched as Heartlord Solewind advanced onto the primessence chains.

The primessence chains were a thousand kilometers long and fifteen meters wide. Although they were described as ‘chains’, they were really more like bridges! Still, people like Ning could stably traverse even a miniscule thin steel wire without swaying in the slightest, to say nothing of a bridge.

“Eh?”

As Solewind advanced through the enormous steel chains, he couldn’t help but frown and say, “Everyone, these chains truly are rather bizarre. Make sure you don’t let your mind and heart be swayed by it.”

“GRAAAH!”

“GRAAAH!”

Two illusory figures suddenly swooped up from the infinitely deep abyss of darkness below the chains. The two moved incredibly fast, traversing a thousand kilometers in a single flicker as they charged towards Heartlord Solewind. One phantom was of a grim-faced man who wielded a warblade, while the other was of an ugly alien creature who wielded nine whips in its nine arms.

Solewind’s gaze grew cold as he saw those two phantoms strike towards him. A series of magic treasures that looked like fiery lotuses began to bloom behind him, and as they bloomed they immediately began to transform into blazing firebirds. There was a total of 391 firebirds in the skies, and they all radiated with blazing auras that easily dissipated the attacks coming from those two phantoms.

Ning and the others frowned upon seeing this. Were these the ‘wraiths’? Why did they seem like cultivators?

“Those are all cultivators who died long, long ago.” Daolord Owlbath explained, “After they died their truesouls were destroyed, but their power was transformed into these strange wraiths. Because you are at the World level, World-level wraiths shall be sent to attack you. If a Daolord attempted to pass... things would be far more frightening.”

Ning and the others nodded.

“Many of them failed while attempting to pass through the primessence chains, and some of them were truly dazzling figures of their time. Later on, these wraiths will group together and attack en masse.” Daolord Owlbath sighed. “To go through the primessence chains and reach the Prime Reaches. Oh, that’s gonna be tough, tough, tough.”

.....

Heartlord Solewind continuously advanced while controlling his magic treasures, using it to break apart all impediments.

Boom! Boom! Boom! The primessence chains themselves were trembling slightly, sending out multiple strange ripples of power. Ning was able to

physically see those ripples emanating out, each expanding to become thirty meters in size. Heartlord Solewind had to rely on the power of the chains to fight back against the devouring power of the abyss, but by doing so he ended up being restricted by the power as well.

“Hmph.”

Heartlord Solewind advanced with cool calmness, using his magic treasures to slaughter all of the attacking wraiths. As he continued to advance, more and more wraiths of increasingly greater power began to charge out of the abyss below the Prime Reaches.

As a Heartforce Cultivator, he was naturally quite skilled in controlling magic treasures from afar. These wraiths, as of right now, were not able to force him into close combat.

.....

“Five hundred kilometers. He’s made it pretty far, pretty fast.” Daolord Owl bath stared in boggled amazement. “This young fellow is way too powerful, and he has an incredibly strong mind and heart.”

“He isn’t even swaying a bit?”

“He’s completely ignoring the effects of the primessence chains?”

The twelve World-level cultivators who had already tried and failed in the past also stared in amazement. The mental influence of the primessence chains would grow increasingly strong, and at five hundred kilometers the influence was now incredibly strong. Generally speaking, even those who were able to endure the mental attacks would feel quite miserable. Heartlord Solewind, however, had an extremely calm look on his face. He looked as though he was simply strolling through the streets. He made it look easy.

Ning and the others all revealed smiles.

“Only one in a hundred can succeed? Hmph. Let them compete with us,” Prince Greatjoy sent to Ning and the others in an extremely smug manner.

“Right.”

“Brother Solewind is making it look easy.”

Although Ning and the others weren't the arrogant type, they agreed with what Greatjoy said. In terms of all-around ability, the five of them truly did surpass the vast majority of the other World-level cultivators in the Genesis Lands. These were the most elite geniuses of the geniuses of the Brightshore Kingdom, after all!

Heartlord Solewind continued to advance. Six hundred kilometers. Seven hundred. Eight. Nine...

Daolord Owl bath and the others watched with slack jaws as this happened. However, towards the end Heartlord Solewind was also forced into close combat, and a look of seriousness appeared on his face for the first time as his movements noticeably slowed down. Still, he gritted his teeth and continued to advance.

Whoosh. Over a thousand wraiths were attacking him now. Heartlord Solewind fought his way through them, then reached the end of this primessence chain and entered the Prime Reaches.

“Ahahah!”

“Excellent.”

“Congratulations, brother Solewind.”

“We'll join you in a bit, Solewind!”

Greatjoy, Ning, Skyfire, and Firesurge were in superb moods. For the first person from their side to challenge this trial and succeed naturally pleased them greatly.

“How is this possible?”

“He succeeded, just like that?”

Daolord Owl bath and the others couldn't even believe it. Passing through the primessence chains was supposed to be incredibly difficult, right? But just now, that bald red-robed kid seemed to have breezed right through it.

“Darknorth, Greatjoy, Skyfire, Firesurge.” Solewind stood at the other

end of the chains, staring at them from afar as he called out loudly, “The mental influence of the primessence chains is terrifyingly strong, far more so than the attacks of the wraiths. You must be careful!”

“Understood!” Ning and the others grinned back at him in response.

“Which of the three of us shall be the next to give it a try?” Greatjoy turned his gaze towards Ning and Firesurge.

Chapter 22: Heaven's Moat

According to what JiNing and the others had planned, the four 'protectors' would first make their attempts, followed by Skyfire Brightshore. Only then would the retainers Su Youji, World Goddess Skywolf, and Chaos Immortal Swallowback make their attempts.

"I'll go next. I'm still quite confident in my chances." Firesurge revealed a smile. Because he had a cold and forbidding aura to begin with, his smile looked rather sinister.

"Alright." Ning and Greatjoy nodded, then watched as Firesurge walked over towards the chains, then stepped onto them.

The gazes of Ji Ning, Greatjoy, Skyfire, the retainers, Daolord Owl bath, and the twelve other World-level cultivators were all focused on this youth dressed in deep blue robes as he advanced through the chains.

"The Prime Reaches. I have to enter them." A terrifying, baleful aura could be seen in Firesurge's eyes. "Nothing and no one will stop me."

Firesurge's path of cultivation had been a path filled with many setbacks and pitfalls. When he had been a weak mortal cultivator, he had lived in a world that had been controlled by ten mighty demonic sects! The demonic sects were filled with guile, treachery, and internecine murder. Every single powerful expert rose to power by trampling across the corpses of others... and Firesurge became the most powerful cultivator of this entire mortal world.

He had continued his path without remorse, eventually entering the greater primordial chaos and then being recruited into the Palace of Kindwater of the Twelve Palaces of Brightshore.

And now, he had been given the chance to join Ning and the others and adventure through the Genesis Lands of this Archaeus region in this alternate universe.

"I had to use every scrap of power I had, but was just barely able to claw my way into fourth place." Firesurge strode forwards as waves buffeted the

area around him. “Solewind, Greatjoy, Darknorth... all three of them are somewhat stronger than me, to say nothing of the most dazzling figures of the Brightshore Kingdom, Bertulu and Eastcult!”

“I’m going to surpass them. I’m going to surpass all cultivators!”

Firesurge felt a certain degree of urgency in this regard. Prince Greatjoy was the strongest of the four, Solewind was the most unfathomable and mysterious, and Darknorth’s sword-intent domain was incredibly tough to deal with. Even worse, Darknorth’s offensive sword-arts had become so powerful that even Firesurge shivered when he saw them.

Why had the gap between him and his colleagues grown so large?

“Kill!”

“Break!”

.....

Firesurge advanced through the thousand kilometer long primessence chains, crushing his way through all of the wraiths that tried to oppose him.

“How dominating.”

“Incredible.”

“He’s plowing through them in an even more brutal manner than Solewind did.”

Ning, Greatjoy, and the others all smiled as they praised him. As for Daolord Owl bath and the other twelve, they just stared intently.

Four hundred kilometers. Five hundred. Six hundred...

Firesurge had experienced numerous setbacks in life in order to reach his current level, and he thus possessed an incredible mind and heart. He was also very close to the others in combat power, and thus he was able to forcibly disperse the wraiths with his attacks.

“Eh?”

Just past the seven hundred kilometer mark, Firesurge suddenly slowed

down dramatically. The smiles quickly disappeared from the faces of Ji Ning and Greatjoy.

“Not good!” Ning was rather worried.

The distant Waterlord Firesurge was now moving slower and slower. He was still wiping out the attacking wraiths, but Ning and the others could clearly tell that something was hampering his combat performance. It seemed as though he was struggling to maintain focus.

“AAARGH!” Waterlord Firesurge let out a frustrated yell, then turned and left. He retreated at high speeds, needing only a few seconds to escape the chains.

He had an ugly, savage look on his face, and his eyes were filled with rage and resentment.

“Brother Firesurge,” Ning called out.

“Firesurge, if we fail the first time, we can try a second or a third time,” Greatjoy said consolingly.

Firesurge took a deep breath, taking control of his emotions. He nodded towards Ning and the others.

In truth, Ning and Greatjoy understand why Firesurge was so unhappy right now. If you failed the first time, you would probably fail the next hundred times as well unless you made significant gains in power or in mental fortitude. Firesurge hadn't even been able to make it to the eight hundred kilometer mark! He had more than two hundred kilometers to go if he wished to make it to the Prime Reaches. His chances were extremely low.

“Be careful, the two of you. The primessence chains are extremely difficult to deal with,” Firesurge said.

“I'm amazed at how nettlesome they are.”

“Mm.”

Ning and Greatjoy both felt a great sense of pressure. Firesurge was still the fourth strongest World-level cultivator of the Twelve Kingdoms of

Brightshore, if one excluded Bertulu and Eastcult; he definitely was a monstrously talented man! For him to have failed meant the primessence chains were far more difficult to deal with than any of them had expected.

“Your performance was incredible, my young friend Firesurge.” Daolord Owl bath was still eating and drinking in a leisurely fashion, and he grinned as he called out, “To be able to make it nearly eight hundred kilometers on the primessence chains is an absolutely incredible feat. Although all of the World-level cultivators here in the Genesis Lands are quite formidable, the vast majority are stymied at the five hundred kilometer mark.”

.....

Firesurge’s failure worried not just Ning and Greatjoy, it worried Skyfire Brightshore even more. This prince of the Brightshore Kingdom was comparable to Firesurge in power, but as for his heart and his willpower? He was probably a bit inferior to even those three retainers. Even the invisible willpower trial which was applied to all entrants into the Genesis Lands had made him feel quite miserable.

“Darknorth, let me give it a try next.” Greatjoy’s eyes were filled with a terrifying desire to do battle. He walked straight towards the primessence chains then began to advance forwards. Ning and the others simply watched silently from behind.

Solewind had drifted through the chains like a calm, unflappable spring breeze.

Firesurge had fought his way through the chains while radiating a powerful aura of murder.

As for Greatjoy, he crushed his way through with absolute power as he advanced in a truly imposing fashion.

“These young fellows are all quite incredible.” Daolord Owl bath blinked. “This Greatjoy guy has already made it past the eight hundred kilometer mark. Uh... and that’s the nine hundred kilometer mark.”

Prince Greatjoy was clearly performing better than Firesurge had as he

cruised through the first nine hundred kilometers. However, at this point he gradually began to slow down as well, and a solemn look appeared on his face. His entire body began to radiate with golden light as he continued to advance in a stable manner.

Ning and the others began to grow nervous as they watched.

“Master.” The armor-clad World Goddess Skywolf normally had a perpetually icy look on her fair features, but now a look of worry had appeared.

Although the wraiths were quite powerful, Prince Greatjoy still found it quite easy to deal with them. And yet... his movements were growing slower and slower.

Finally, at the nine hundred and twenty kilometer mark, he came to a halt. He stood there, easily deflecting the wraiths but unable to advance any further.

“Ugh.” A soft sigh... then Prince Greatjoy also turned and left, not hesitating in the slightest.

Peerless geniuses like them knew when they had to go all-out and when they had to be cautious! If you tried to force yourself past your limits in a place like this, you would most likely fall into that abyss and be destroyed in body and truesoul alike.

Prince Greatjoy walked back with a slight frown on his forehead, as though he was lost in thought.

“Heh heh.” Prince Greatjoy glanced at the cultivators in front of him, then began to chuckle. “When Solewind made it across, I figured the the primessence chains couldn’t be that tough. Who would’ve thought that the next two would both fail, myself included?”

“Brother Greatjoy, you made it much farther than I did,” Firesurge said.

“A failure is still just a failure.” Prince Greatjoy shook his head, then looked at Ning. “Darknorth, these primessence chains are incredibly strange. You have to be careful not to let yourself be ensnared in those illusions. The reason why I didn’t dare to advance any further was because

I realized that I had already reached my limits. If I advanced any further, I would've been ensnared by those illusions and would've been completely unable to deal with the other dangers facing me."

Ning nodded.

Solewind was a Heartforce Cultivator and thus was the best-equipped to deal with this issue. That was why he had been able to cruise through with ease. Alas, Firesurge and Greatjoy had both failed despite being incredibly talented figures.

.....

As for Daolord Owl bath and the other twelve World-level cultivators, they sighed with amazement. Although Greatjoy and Firesurge had both failed, they had both made it incredibly far.

"Firesurge and I will probably wander through the various places in the outer reaches of the Genesis Lands. We'll only come back here if we are able to grow significantly more powerful." Greatjoy looked at Ning. "Darknorth, I wouldn't mind having you by my side as we wander through the outer reaches."

"You might not mind, but I sure as hell would." Ning laughed. "I still want to wander the Prime Reaches alongside Solewind. The poor guy will be lonely if he has to go through that place by himself."

Laughing, Ning strode confidently towards the primessence chains.

"Be careful, Master." The Flamefairy Su Youji was quite worried. She knew her own limits and knew that she probably stood no chance of making it into the inner reaches, but she truly hoped that Ji Ning would.

The Prime Reaches was a place which even the Eternal Emperors of this universe wished to enter, and it was also the place which had completely transformed the master of the Church of Annihilation.

Rumble...

Ning advanced through the primessence chains as electric light and watery light surged out of his body. The seven types of Dao lightning and

Dao water formed an awe-inspiring Yin-Yang Sword Domain around him which furiously repelled and slew all enemies in range of him. The attacking wraiths were all ground to dust before even getting close to him.

The way in which Ning was advancing through the chains was even more lofty and imposing than Solewind's. His Yin-Yang Sword Domain truly was the perfect weapon for dealing with group attacks!

"The Prime Reaches..." Ning stared forwards at the other end of the chains, where the inner reaches lay.

He had fought so hard for this chance, and in the end he had been able to make it into the Genesis Lands of this alternate universe. Was he going to fail now, at the very last moment?

There was a huge difference between the outer reaches and the inner reaches!

"Brother Solewind, just wait a moment for me," Ning called out, his eyes brimming with the intent to do battle. His Yin-Yang Sword Domain swirled around him as he continuously advanced through the long primessence chains.

Chapter 23: The Inner Reaches

As soon as Ji Ning stepped onto the primessence chains, he could sense an invisible web of power wash over him. He felt as though a strange melody was playing nonstop within his sea of consciousness. Still, Ning was no ordinary World-level cultivator. He was able to easily ignore a disruptive influence on this level.

He walked forward through the chains, moving tremendously fast, and as he did the various ghosts began to flicker towards him from afar, throwing themselves at Ning. Alas, Ning's Yin-Yang Sword Domain stretched out to encompass an area of eight hundred kilometers. As soon as the wraiths charged into his domain, they were instantly ground into nothingness. Ning's Yin-Yang Sword Domain was capable of slaying even Daolords of the First Step, much less mere wraiths!

"Eh? The invisible power covering the primessence chains seems to be growing stronger and stronger." Ning continuously advanced towards the inner reaches, and the sound of the melody grew increasingly loud as well. The melody was constantly distracting him, despite his best efforts. It sang of a peerlessly beautiful maiden, of endless treasures, of the ineffable Hegemon, of the warmth of family, of the undying ardor of love, of the deep, warm-blooded feelings which friends and brothers shared with each other...

It was an absolute delight. It told him that if he truly fell into the song and allowed himself to be intoxicated by it, that he would have all of these things and more.

The alluring power of the song grew stronger and stronger.

"Eight hundred kilometers. Nine hundred kilometers! He's hit the nine hundred kilometer mark. Darknorth is way too strong." Daolord Owlbat stared wide-eyed in shock. "He's merely using a domain, but he's still able to crush all of those wraiths. He hasn't even used any actual techniques at all."

Su Youji and the others watched nervously as well.

“He hit the nine hundred mark?” Firesurge watched quietly. Of the four geniuses of the Twelve Palaces, both Ji Ning and Greatjoy had made it past the nine hundred kilometer mark. Firesurge, however, hadn’t even made it to the eight hundred mark!

“Brother Darknorth’s sword-intent domain truly is formidable.” Prince Greatjoy smiled. “His domain alone is enough for him to defeat all of the attacking wraiths.”

The Yin-Yang Sword Domain was a Supreme Dao, after all, and this one in particular was terrifyingly strong due to it having been formed by seven types of Dao lightning and Dao water. In terms of raw power, it was only slightly weaker than the killer attacks of Greatjoy and Solewind!

In addition, the wraiths focused on attacking en masse. The Yin-Yang Sword Domain was literally developed for the express purpose of defeating massed attackers! In addition, it had been easy for all four of them to deal with the wraiths; none of them had been forced to show their true power. All four of them were comparable to Daolords of the Second Step. Clearing, the trial of the primessence chains didn’t place too heavy an emphasis on raw power; so long as you were comparable to a strong Daolord of the First Step, you’d be able to handle the wraiths.

“Nine hundred twenty. Nine hundred thirty. Nine hundred forty. Nine hundred fifty...” Su Youji counted softly to herself.

Everyone was watching with bated breath. Was yet another member of the group about to pass through the primessence chains?

Prince Greatjoy fell silent. He simply watched as Ning advanced farther than he did.

.....

The invisible power covering the primessence chains weren’t completely focused on Ji Ning in specific. It would be more accurate to say that the primessence chains were innately filled with a mysterious power which naturally emanated outwards, resulting in them affecting Ning.

The closer Ning moved to the inner reaches, the stronger the power

released by the primessence chains became.

The melody grew more and more drifting and abstruse as it sought to seduce Ning into its flows. In fact, Ning could almost see a series of illusory worlds appear before him. If he stopped fighting back against them for just a single instant, he would instantly be drawn into those illusory worlds and lose himself within them.

Nine hundred eighty. Nine hundred ninety...

Ning continued to advance. Although the illusory melody was taking a firmer and firmer grip over his mind and soul, he still continued to steadfastly defend against its intrusions. He had just a single thought in his mind – he wanted to keep focused on his goal of making it to the end of the primessence chains.

“Ah?!”

“Is he really going to make it into the inner reaches?”

“So close. So close!”

Daolord Owl bath and the others stared in astonishment, as did Prince Greatjoy and Firesurge. As for Su Youji, she was the most nervous of them all as she stared unblinkingly at the domain-ensconced white-robed youth.

Finally...

Ning took one final step and broke past the bewildering force covering the primessence chains. The furious wraiths did their best to try to stop him, but they were completely unable to go through the Yin-Yang Sword Domain and touch Ning in the slightest.

“Whew.” Ning couldn’t help but let out a sigh of relief when he took that final step and entered the inner reaches. He then dismissed his Yin-Yang Sword Domain.

“The Prime Reaches...” As soon as Ning stepped onto the other side, he could sense a surge of invisible power rush towards him from the ground. The surge of power warmed him, feeling almost like the embrace of a mother.

Ning was secretly speechless. Then again, the Prime Reaches was the most central location of the Genesis Lands. Even the prime essences of this universe were located here. Even the strangest of phenomena were to be expected of here.

“Congratulations, Darknorth.” Heartlord Solewind had stepped backwards to avoid the Yin-Yang Sword Domain, but he now grinned as he advanced to move next to Ning.

“That was far too close for comfort. But, I made it.” Ning smiled.

“It is incredible that you were able to make it this far, brother Darknorth. The primessence chains truly do have an incredibly strong mental alluring affect,” Solewind sighed.

Ning nodded.

The effect was indeed quite strong. Still, Ning knew that he had one particular advantage over all three of the others! Greatjoy, Solewind, and Firesurge were fairly ‘normal’ World-level cultivators. In battle, they could instantly unleash a level of power comparable to that of Daolords of the Second Step, but it was all thanks to their secret arts, divine abilities, and insights into the Dao.

In the end, their power was built off of World-level divine power and Immortal energy.

Ning, however, was different!

He had the power of the azureflower mist energy, which was equivalent to Daolord-level energy. It had nourished his soul, making it comparable to the soul of a Daolord of the First Step! As a result, it was incredibly difficult to shake Ning’s soul and cause him to be trapped within an illusion. Ning’s mental fortitude was actually merely on par with Prince Greatjoy’s, but his soul was far stronger. As a result, he was naturally able to do what Greatjoy could not.

Skyfire Brightshore was a prince of the Brightshore Kingdom, a living being on the same level of power as the Ancient cultivators, Bertulu, or Waterwalker. They were amongst the most elite races of living creatures,

giving them souls that were incredibly strong and essentially on par with Ning's azureflower-reinforced soul.

Kilostar was another example. He had trained in the [Thousand Bodies Sutra], and so his divine body was comparable to a Daolord's, as was his soul.

It was incredibly rare for a World-level cultivator to have a Daolord-level soul. Solewind was a Heartforce Cultivator, and so he had certain special techniques which could be used to strengthen the soul, but in the end he was still not nearly as strong in this regard as Ning and Bertulu were. As for Greatjoy and Firesurge, they were somewhat weaker in this regard as well.

"The only reason I made it through was because I have the azureflower mist energy sustaining and strengthening my soul. Heartlord Solewind, however, made it through with ease. He really lives up to his reputation as the one and only Heartlord of the Heartforce Palace," Ning mused to himself in praise.

Ning's gaze shifted towards the inner reaches. Previously, when he had been in the outer reaches, he could see that there was an enormous world here but was unable to make out any details at all. Now, however...

"Eh?" Ning frowned.

It was as scene of chaos and decay.

The ground was littered with enormous gouges, holes, and craters. Clearly, they had been left behind ancient powers who had battled against each other! These were marks that had been left behind by swords and sabers.

Far off in the distance, he saw a series of badly damaged mountain ranges... as well as a series of towering, massive corpses that emanated ripples of terrifying power.

"These corpses...?" Ning stared at them. Every single corpse emanated ripples of incredible power that were just as strong as the aura which Lord Woodflower had emanated.

“Are these all Eternal Emperors?” Ning mused. “It seems this place, the birthplace of the universe, is actually a battlefield. But why the hell are there so many Eternal Emperors here?”

Eternal Emperors were incredibly rare and few in number. Based on what Ning and the others had learned, this was true even here in this alternate universe. In the Endless Territories, the Brightshore Kingdom only had a few Eternal Emperors total! But here in the Prime Reaches, Ning was able to see at least twelve of these corpses which emanated auras of terrifying power. All of them had to be Eternal Emperor level corpses.

And these were only the ones he could see right now. Most likely, the Prime Reaches held far more corpses within it. No wonder so many Eternal Emperors of the Church of Annihilation had come here. No wonder the master of the Church of Annihilation had been able to skyrocket in power after entering this place.

“I, Ji Ning, am blessed to be able to be able to enter a place like this.” Ning felt a great surge of joy swell in his heart. Those ten thousand years of arduous travel and those multiple scrapes with death... right now, Ning felt as though everything was worth it.

“Skyfire is starting as well,” Solewind said.

Ning calmed himself down, turning to stare at the other end of the primessence chains.

Skyfire Brightshore had moved onto the primessence chains as well. Although his soul was comparable to Ning’s in strength, his mental fortitude was incredibly weak. In the end, he simply hadn’t experienced enough. Most likely, even an average World-level cultivator who had risen to power in the mortal world and experienced all of its trials and tribulations would have a far stronger mind and heart than he did.

In the end, Skyfire Brightshore was brought to a quick halt. He managed to move close to the five hundred kilometer mark, but in the end was forced to retreat. A look of disappointment was on his face. He hadn’t even been able to make it to the five hundred kilometer mark! Even if he was able to somehow become much mentally tougher, he probably still

would have very little chance of traversing these primessence chains.

Chapter 24: Five Corpses

“I have zero chance. I’m not even close to meeting the mark.” Skyfire Brightshore left the primessence chains, then shook his head ruefully.

“Don’t let yourself feel too depressed about this. At least the two of us will keep you company, right?” Prince Greatjoy laughed.

“Solewind is a Heartforce Cultivator, remember?” Firesurge sent him a mental message of consolation. “As for Darknorth, he joined the Twelve Palaces just a short while ago but quickly rose to become the second-ranked expert in our trials. His rate of improvement is absolutely ridiculous. It’s not surprising that the two of them were able to make it into the inner reaches.”

Skyfire nodded. Moments later, Prince Greatjoy nodded as well. Although he was an incredibly proud man, he had to admit that Ji Ning’s rate of improvement really was fast.

“If I fall one step behind, I’ll always be behind.” Firesurge frowned.

“Haha, let’s not get depressed.” Prince Greatjoy was in a fine mood. “In the end, lucky encounters and karmic blessings might be useful, but cultivation is ultimately up to yourself and your own efforts! They are in the inner reaches while we are in the outer reaches, but we won’t necessarily fall behind them!”

“Right. In fact, we might actually overtake them.” Firesurge nodded as well.

However, they all knew that they were just pumping themselves up and encouraging themselves. They all understood that the inner reaches had far more opportunities hidden within them than the outer reaches did, and both Solewind and Darknorth were just as talented as the three of them. There was no way they wouldn’t improve even further!

.....

Prince Greatjoy’s retainer, ‘World Goddess Skywolf’, also gave the primessence chains a try. In the end, she was forced to come to a halt at

around five hundred kilometers.

Flamefairy Su Youji actually managed to make it close to the six hundred kilometer mark. Clearly, she was quite skilled at defending against illusions, as that was her own path as well. Alas, in the end she simply hadn't reached a high enough level of skill in this Dao.

Solewind's retainer, Chaos Immortal Swallowback, actually managed to make it all the way to the nine hundred and ten kilometer mark! This badly shocked Ning and all the other spectators. Who would've thought that he would be able to make it this far?! This was almost as far as Prince Greatjoy himself had made it, and was a far stronger performance than Waterlord Firesurge's!

Of course, in an actual battle he was far from being a match for Prince Greatjoy, Firesurge, or Skyfire. In the field of resisting illusions, however, he was clearly a very strong contender.

"Solewind and Darknorth, the two of you can stay in the inner reaches. We'll wander the outer reaches. Don't end up weaker than us by the next time we meet!" Prince Greatjoy laughed from afar, his voice rippling through space and making it to the other side of the chains.

"We'll part ways here. The two of you better not disappoint me!" A stubborn, intense light gleamed in Firesurge's eyes.

As for Su Youji, she stared at Ji Ning from afar.

Chaos Immortal Swallowback did the same towards his own master, Heartlord Solewind.

The two parties separated, heading off in different directions.

Prince Greatjoy and the others depart, beginning their journey through the various mysterious regions of the outer reaches. There, they would search for their own karmic blessings and opportunities. As for Ning and Solewind, they began their true journey into the Prime Reaches.

"Incredible."

"Crazy strong."

“Where the hell did these World-level cultivators come from?” The twelve spectators and Daolord Owl bath were all utterly amazed. They had been wandering the outer reaches for many years now, and dreamed of being able to make it past the primessence chains. They knew exactly how hard it was for one to be able to actually overcome the chains... but just now, two of the eight World-level cultivators in that group, the ones named ‘Solewind’ and ‘Darknorth’, had actually succeeded. Two others had made it past the nine hundred kilometer mark!

“Absolutely amazing.”

“Given how extraordinarily strong their hearts and souls are, they must be under the tutelage of a truly extraordinary power.”

“No ordinary school could possibly hand over eight Archaeus medallions at once.” They couldn’t help but continue to chatter in amazement, having firmly engraved the names and faces of Ning and the others in their minds.

.....

Ning and Solewind gave the primessence chains a final glance. Prince Greatjoy and the others had already flown away.

“Let’s go,” Solewind said. “Once we leave the Prime Reaches, we’ll meet with them again.”

“Right.” Ning nodded. He had left a message-talisman with Su Youji. Once they left the inner reaches, he would be able to locate her with ease, thanks to his connection to that talisman. Most likely, Solewind had left behind something similar with his own retainer, Chaos Immortal Swallowback.

The world of the inner reaches was a world that was roughly a billion kilometers in size. This wasn’t exactly small, but for cultivators of their power it wasn’t exactly large either.

This place was filled with an aura of utterly immense power. All flight was impossible here, and it was impossible for one to scan the area using godsense or chaosense, much less engage in spatial teleportation! The

only option was to rely on one's two feet. Thankfully, the two of them were able to walk quite quickly, moving far faster than the limits of the Heavenly Daos.

"This place is an ancient battlefield." As Ning and Solewind advanced through this world, they moved towards the peak of a mountain, then came to a halt and surveyed the entirety of the inner reaches.

As far as the eye could see, the earth was littered with trenches, gouges, canyons, crater, and rubble. This was a ruined, destroyed world. Look at that terrifying gorge over there, filled with an utterly terrifying sword-intent that was so strong that Ning could hardly breathe. The strength and intensity of that sword-intent was so great that it was definitely the most powerful sword-intent Ning had ever encountered.

Even the most powerful sword-strike of Emperor Mirrorsnow was significantly weaker compared to the sword-intent radiating from that great gorge.

Awe-inspiring sword-intent.

Bounding saber-intent.

Billowing plumes of watery light.

Chaotic fields of spacetime.

The entire world of the inner reaches was filled with the scars of battle. If you could recognize a leopard's spots, you'd know you were looking at a leopard. Just by looking at the remaining scars, Ning was able to imagine how incredibly powerful the major powers who left the scars behind were.

"So many corpses... and almost all of them are 540,000 meters tall," Solewind said in amazement.

"From our position atop this mountain, I can see at least twenty-six corpses." Ning stared from afar as well. Due to the nearby mountains blocking off his vision as well as the tremendous power throbbing within this world, Ning wasn't able to bend light and see far beyond the surrounding mountains. In a 'normal' place, he would be able to see everything for countless kilometers around him, even if he was inside a

completely sealed-off edifice.

Alas... this place was different.

“They look like cultivators, but all of their corpses are 540,000 meters tall. Some of them are even larger! Those are probably the Aberrants,” Ning said.

“All of them should be at the Eternal Emperor level,” Solewind evaluated.

A divinity’s height was one way to measure their power.

Ning and the others had reached the limits of power possible for World Gods, with a total of 36,000 godgems in their bodies. As for the Dao-tree within their Jindan chaos regions, the trees were 108,000 meters tall. Their true personal height was also roughly 108,000 meters tall! Many of the great powers were born as ordinary mortals who were merely a few meters tall, and thus they were accustomed to using those heights in their ‘normal’ form. As a result, in both the Endless Territories as well as this alternate universe, most people stayed at a ‘normal’ height of just a few meters.

Even the princes of the Brightshore Kingdom whose true bodies were the size of chaos stars would generally stay in a form where they were roughly on par with Ji Ning in size.

The absolute hard limit for World-level cultivators was 108,000 meters.

The absolute limit for Daolords was 540,000 meters.

Reaching this height meant that you had reached the Verge of the Daomerge. One you succeeded in your Daomerge, your divine body would remain 540,000 meters tall and be comprised of 540,000 godgems. The difference was... upon succeeding in the Daomerge, the ‘Dao’ within those godgems would gain true eternity, making your divine body both perfect and eternal as well.

.....

Ning and Solewind continued to advance through the Prime Eaches,

carefully analyzing everything.

The two of them quickly discovered two Daolords and three World-level cultivators in the inner reaches! The world was just a billion kilometers in size, after all. They were able to quickly scan through the entire place, and they discovered a total of thirty-five corpses of incredible antiquity. Each corpse emanated an aura of tremendous power that carried a scent of eternity.

“Thirty-five Eternal Emperors died here?” Solewind and Ning both felt breathless.

It must be understood that even the Brightshore Kingdom only had a few Eternal Emperors, and the number of Eternal Emperors belonging to the Aeonian Kingdom could be counted on one hand. In general, Eternal Emperors were incredibly rare.

Thirty-five Eternal Emperors... this was an incredible, terrifying figure. And yet, such a powerful force of cultivators had silently died in this place, leaving behind few traces of their passing.

“Eternal Emperors are truly eternal existences. If they die, they die because others killed them. But in normal battles, a fatal end should result in their divine bodies being destroyed. Their bodies are in perfect shape, and all of them seem quite peaceful. Some were standing, some were sitting... it seems as though they welcomed death peacefully.” Solewind had a solemn look on his face as he sent, “I can’t even imagine what level of power is needed to cause thirty-five Eternal Emperors to silently, peacefully pass away into death.”

Ning nodded. This truly was a terrifying thought.

“This place gave birth to the entire universe, after all,” Ning sent mentally. “There will always be secrets which we will never know the answers to. We are still too weak and know too little.”

“Mm.” Solewind nodded.

“We’ve gone through this entire world. It really is filled with many opportunities, but all of them were left behind by these thirty-five ancient

powers. We haven't found the prime essences of this universe at all," Ning sent.

"We are too weak. We probably aren't able to find or locate them," Solewind sent. "Let us do the same as those two Daolords and World-level cultivators are doing. Let us search for the legacies left behind by those thirty-five major powers."

"Alright." Ning nodded.

The thirty-five ancient corpses had prepared for and welcomed death in a very calm manner, and they had left behind all of their treasures.

Those who were bound to them by destiny would gain access to those treasures.

Every single one of the deceased major powers was terrifyingly strong. Three of them were particularly terrifying, and the aura emanating from their corpses was so strong that Ning felt certain that they were comparable to that of the almighty Hegemon, who Ning had met in person.

Chapter 25: Three Great Leaders

Both Ji Ning and Solewind kept a cautious watch as they advanced through the world of the inner reaches.

“Brother Darknorth, are you seeing what I’m seeing?” Heartlord Solewind suddenly stared at one of the corpses in front of them, a corpse that was seated in the lotus position and emanating an aura of faint golden light. The awesome aura emanating from that corpse was boundlessly majestic, and it would forever be an aura of true eternity. A total of sixteen treasures had been placed before that corpse, and each of the sixteen radiated extraordinary power.

“Are you talking about how the corpses are divided up into three groups?” Ning asked.

“Right.” Heartlord Solewind nodded. “The thirty-five corpses here seem to be divided up into three groups, each of which had a leader. This corpse before us, the one radiating golden light... it is one of the leaders. I have the feeling that he was a Heartforce Cultivator who gained eternity through that path.”

Ning revealed a shocked look. “A Heartforce Cultivator? Are you sure about this?”

“I’m absolutely sure.” Solewind’s eyes were flickering with excitement as he stared at the glowing golden corpse.

Ning couldn’t help but feel truly stunned, because Heartforce Cultivators truly were incredibly rare. The entire Heartforce Palace only had a few Daolords. For a Heartforce Cultivator to become an Eternal Emperor... Ning had never even heard of such a figure. And yet, seated right before him was the corpse of an Eternal Emperor who was a Heartforce Cultivator.

Rumble...

Ning and Solewind couldn’t help but walk towards that seated corpse. Suddenly, a series of invisible ripples swept outwards and brushed past the

two of them.

“Eh?” Ning suddenly sensed a powerful force push back at him, making it impossible for him to move forward by a single step.

“It seems as though there are no ties of destiny between this ancient power and myself.” Ning smiled.

Solewind, however, suffered no impediments at all. He glanced at Ning. “Brother Darknorth, although there are thirty-five other corpses here, I’ve already decided that I’m going to choose this one and give it a try.”

“If you’ve made up your mind... all I can say is, be careful.” Ning nodded.

All thirty-five of these ancient powers had peacefully welcomed death, leaving behind all of their treasures and legacies.

If you wanted to acquire them, you would have to overcome the trials and challenges they had laid out! These trials were extremely dangerous, and some were even lethal. Daolord Owl bath had long ago warned them that many entered the inner reaches and then died there, never to return.

“He is one of the three leaders within the inner reaches, and the only Eternal Emperor who was also a Heartforce Cultivator.” Heartlord Solewind stared at the towering, seated figure with a blazing look in his eyes. “No one in the Heartforce Palace has ever been able to become an Eternal Emperor through heartforce. Now that I’ve finally found someone who was able to do this... I’ll risk everything I have. If I can learn some of the techniques this ancient power used, I might have a shot at gaining eternity in the future as well.”

Ning nodded.

Heartforce Cultivators had the most difficult path of all! The Sword Palace, Spacetime Palace, and other palaces all had cultivators who were able to become Eternal Emperors. The Heartforce Palace was the only palace which had never produced a single one. In fact, the entire concept was unheard of.

And yet... here in the inner reaches of the Genesis Lands of this alternate universe, they had discovered the corpse of a deceased Heartforce

Cultivator who had reached that level.

“I’m heading over there.” Solewind looked at Ning. “Be careful.”

“Mm.” Ning nodded.

Heartlord Solewind began to move forwards once more. Whoosh! A rippling wave of spacetime swept past Solewind, causing him to completely disappear.

Ning stood there for a brief moment. Sensing that the powerful barrier in front of him was not going to disappear, he chose to turn and leave. He was still very weak in terms of heartforce; clearly, he didn’t meet the minimum threshold this deceased figure had left behind for those who wished to acquire his treasures.

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Ning advanced by himself through the inner reaches. The more he inspected those thirty-five corpses, the more he got the feeling that they did indeed belong to three different factions.

As for the three most powerful corpses, they had auras of incredible might that were absolutely on par with the almighty Hegemon’s.

“The second leader.” Ning stared at an enormous four-legged beast that had a pair of curved horns on its head. Its aura was filled with the intent of endless annihilation, and just looking at the beast made Ning’s heart clench. Even in death, its eyes seemed cold, lofty, and proud. This was a creature who was unwilling to bow its head to anyone. Behind it were five Eternal Emperors that looked like its retainers.

“The third leader.” After walking forwards for a long period of time, Ning raised his head and stared at the third leader. What he saw caused his eyes to light up. This third leader was a sword-wielder!

He saw a towering man standing there, both hands clenched around an enormous greatsword that was a deep blue color. The hilt of the sword was pressed against his chest while the tip leaned against ground. The man himself stood there like the pillar which could hold up an entire world! He had a distant gaze in his dead, peaceful eyes. Anyone who

looked at him would get the feeling that he would probably be able to survive even the annihilation of the universe itself.

And yet... this grandmaster of the Dao of the Sword, a man who emanated an incredibly dense and heavy aura of sword-intent... had died here as well.

Behind him stood two other men. One was a white-robed man with a smile on his face who carried three swords on his back; a violet sword, a golden sword, and a white sword. He stood there, emanating an aura of ephemeral grace, and his invisible aura of sword-intent seemed similarly ephemeral.

The other man was dressed in azure armor and had a mask on his face, revealing only a pair of eyes that were filled with hatred. Behind him there were nine enormous blood-colored swords that had been plunged into the earth, and every single sword carried an incredibly powerful aura of murder.

“The greatsword-wielding leader was able to convince two other Eternal Emperors of the Dao of the Sword to stand behind him as they died. The three of them had to be incredibly close friends or family,” Ning mused.

An absolutely overwhelming amount of power could be used to cause other major powers to serve you, much as how the Eternal Emperors of the Brightshore kingdom all served the almighty Hegemon. But when everyone knew that death was certain... continued servitude was no longer contingent on mere power alone.

If you knew you were going to die but still chose to stand behind someone, it most likely meant that you felt tremendous amounts of affection for that person.

“Eh?” Ning’s gaze suddenly shifted to a nearby mountain range, located quite close to the three towering masters of the Dao of the Sword. The entire side of the mountain range had been completely carved flat, and the surface was filled with multiple paintings of that greatsword-wielding man. There were paintings of him in battle, paintings of him smiling, and even paintings of him drinking wine in a leisurely manner.

There were a total of nineteen of these paintings, and Ning could sense the deep emotions that had been infused into every stroke. There was an intense sense of longing and wistfulness in those paintings which hadn't lessened at all despite the passage of countless years. Clearly, the artist truly missed the greatsword-wielding expert very much.

"Who painted this?" Ning mused. "It seems as though the artist had an extremely close relationship to the deceased."

"Later, I'll definitely have to go take a closer look at him." Ning glanced at the greatsword-wielding expert.

It must be understood that the greatsword-wielding expert was one of the three dead leaders. When Ning looked at him, Ning could sense an aura that was not one whit inferior to that of the almighty Hegemon's! The two other Eternal Emperors stood directly behind the greatsword-wielder, and the trials the three had left behind were actually linked as well. If Ning moved just a little bit closer, he would be drawn into a danger-filled trial grounds.

Ning had tested things out already. When he moved closer to the corpses, he hadn't been pushed back by any invisible surges of power... but he knew that if moved any further in that direction, he would immediately be drawn into a world of trials.

"They really did leave behind quite a few treasures." Ning couldn't help but sigh.

For one, the greatsword which the leader was leaning on emanated an aura of incredible density and ponderance. Ning felt certain that this sword had to be a Universe treasure! The weapons which the two experts behind him were wielding were comparatively weaker, but they also had other treasures which had been placed next to their corpses.

As for the leader himself, there was a total of twelve treasures which had been placed in front of him.

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Thirty-five corpses, three of which belonged to experts of the Dao of the

Sword.

Still, Ning was in no rush. He continued his explorations, moving to investigate the other corpses. He even spent a bit of time inspecting the scars of battle, because he was already gaining some insights from what he had seen thus far.

Whoooooosh.

The canyon wind howled through the mountains, carrying with it a mysterious, ancient aura.

“The wind.” Ning stood there in the center of the canyon, eyes shut as he focused on everything around him.

.....

The world here was distorted and shattered, and spacetime itself was in disarray. Ning had entered this world, which was nothing more than something created accidentally due to the battles between those major powers. It wasn't an actual trial-world, and so it wasn't that dangerous.

Ning strode through the distorted fields of spacetime, avoiding the most dangerous places as he continuously meditated on everything he saw.

“Is this the nature of spacetime?” Ning murmured softly.

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Fire blazed throughout this area. There was the corpse of a major power seated in the lotus position, and everything around him for a million kilometers was bathed in endless flames.

This major power had died long ago, but his Dao was eternal. As a result, it continuously attracted and drew in flames from the surrounding world, causing the conflagration to burn perpetually.

Ning stepped into the flames.

The closer he moved towards that major power, the hotter the flames burned. As Ning walked through the flames, he could sense a hint of an eternal Dao of fire which whispered through the tendrils of fire. Ning was able to learn much as he carefully attuned himself to each flickering

flame.

“Fire...” Ning murmured to himself.

Chapter 26: Intent

Time flowed on.

Ji Ning continued his journey through the world of the Prime Reaches, going through the various battlefields and scars that had been left upon the land.

While doing so, Ning came to realize that there were actually thirty-nine different types of scars! It must be understood that even Eternal Emperors who had gained eternity through the Dao of the Sword would all have followed different paths and interpreted their Daos in unique, special ways. Thus, there were differences in the 'Dao vestiges' they left behind through their attacks, making it fairly simple to differentiate the scars and markings into multiple 'types'.

"Thirty-nine? There are thirty-five deceased major powers, and they match up to thirty-five of the Dao vestiges left behind. But there are four types of scars which don't match up to anyone." Ning was rather amazed by this, as he had discovered something else as well. "The Daos of those three leaders are all awesome and overwhelming, filled with inconceivable force. But one of the four types of Dao vestiges can be found everywhere, even though it seems plain and unremarkable. I spent more than three hundred years inspecting this place before I realized how terrifying it is."

Most likely, that particular Dao vestige belonged to the Dao of Primordial Chaos. It seemed very ordinary, but when you truly delved deep into it you would realize that it had surpassed the level which those three leaders were at.

"In the battle that was fought, there was someone who was even more powerful than those three leaders." Ning was truly stunned. He could sense that those three leaders should have been on par with the almighty Hegemon himself; even if they were weaker, they wouldn't have been weaker by much. But this fourth figure... Ning had the feeling that he had actually surpassed the almighty Hegemon.

"There's always a mountain taller than the 'tallest' you've seen."

Ning shook his head. “But what in the world happened here, within the Genesis Lands of this universe?” Ning couldn’t help but sigh. Moments later, his eyes lit up. “Still... as far as I’m concerned, this is an enormous present for me!”

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Ning had spent quite a bit of his time and energy on attuning to the various different Dao vestiges that had been left behind, especially the strongest vestige of a Dao of Primordial Chaos. Every so often, he would nap at the top of a mountain. At other times, he would sit down in the lotus position next to a river, listening to its waters gurgle. He would walk through an icy land of snow, then occasionally drift within the waters of a lake... and just like that, 6913 years went past.

“There’s a certain type of a sword in this world. It is unfathomable and inscrutable, traceless and untrackable. The moment it appears is the moment when the enemy shall perish.”

Ning revealed a smile as he drew out Violetjewel, then struck out with it. Whoosh.

Both Ning and his sword both completely vanished, becoming truly traceless and untrackable.

It wasn’t a spatial teleportation. It wasn’t a secret art of some sort. Just like that... Ning vanished.

Pop! Three thousand meters away, Ning suddenly reappeared as his sword chopped downwards towards a mental target.

“What type of a sword can truly be described as traceless and untrackable? An invisible sword, a sword you cannot see or sense at all. This type of sword is the most difficult sword to defend against.” A smile was on Ning’s face as he turned his gaze towards the corpses of the ancient powers that were off in the distance, then bowed deeply in gratitude and respect. “Thank you, seniors. I have finally developed the sword-intent of my ‘Shadowless’ stance.” [Brightmoon] sword-art, Shadowless stance.

In the past, when Ning used this stance, he would use various omnipresent Daos to greatly enhance the speed of his strikes. For example, if he was in a windy area he would borrow the power of the wind itself, while if he was in a sunny area he would borrow the power of light. He could even borrow the power of the spatial ripples which filled almost every place.

Because this was a technique which borrowed the power of various different Daos, Ning's Shadowless stance was truly ghostly and inscrutable, allowing it to fluctuate and speed up in odd ways, giving it tremendous power.

However... his stance had never been able to improve to reach the same level which his Yin-Yang sword-intent and his Blood Drop sword-intent were at.

Only after coming to the inner reaches and seeing all the Dao vestiges left behind by many Eternal Emperors, especially the vestiges related to the deceptively simple and yet overwhelmingly powerful Dao of Primordial Chaos, had Ning suddenly realized the truth.

"What does 'Shadowless' even mean? It isn't about borrowing from the power of all things around it; it means to truly become one with all things.

"There's no way a sword can truly 'vanish', but when it becomes one with all things around it will become completely undetectable to any enemies.

"When the weather is windy, it can transform into a gust of wind.

"When it is bright, it can transform into a streak of light.

"When it is in space, it can transform into a spatial ripple.

"Every single part of a universe, no matter where, is subject to the influence and power of the prime essences of that universe. If my sword can completely merge into those things, it'll naturally become truly shadowless and invisible." Ning finally realized what his true goal for his 'Shadowless' stance should be.

And so, after having spent 6913 years in the inner reaches meditating on

the various different Dao vestiges, he was finally able to develop a completely new Shadowless stance.

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Ning's body was as tough as a magic treasure. Just like his sword, it could also merge into all things. After both he and his sword did so, his attacks became even faster and even more ghostly than before.

"At present, I can just barely merge my sword into its surroundings. Although it cannot be seen, it can still be detected through godsense," Ning mused to himself. "As my skill in this stance improves, I'll be able to truly make it one with all things, making it so that not even godsense will be able to detect it. Only then will this stance be truly deadly."

The Dao was present in all places. One day, his Shadowless stance would also be in all places.

A sword which not even godsense could detect, a sword which you would only see when it suddenly plunged into your skull... how terrifying such a sword would be! But of course, actually reaching this level would be very difficult.

"If I can train this technique to the apex, it will become truly shadowless and formless, capable of appearing anywhere. Alas... I'm still far, far away from that stage." Ning knew how far he still had to go. In fact, he had actually witnessed someone else who had succeeded in this goal – the major power who wielded the Dao of Primordial Chaos. The primordial chaos encompassed all Daos. The reason why it had taken Ning so long to discover that this major power was even stronger than those three leaders was precisely because this power's Dao of Primordial Dao was nigh-invisible, having seamlessly integrated all the other Dao vestiges into it.

Only after carefully inspecting the inner reaches for many years did he come to this shocking realization!

As for that major power... he had infused all things into his Dao, making it almost undetectable by even godsense or heartforce. One could only discover it through other means.

Of the [Brightmoon] sword-art, Ning now had three complete sword-intents; the Blood Drop sword-intent, the Yin-Yang sword-intent, and the new Shadowless sword-intent.

Although the Shadowless sword-intent had a weakness in that it could be detectable through godsense, strictly speaking this wasn't really a weakness. How many Daolords could make themselves undetectable to godsense, after all? Because the Shadowless sword-intent could be merged into all things and all Daos, it was now even faster and even more inscrutable than before. This made it far more powerful, and it had been fundamentally transformed, allowing it to skyrocket to the same level as that of the Blood Drop sword-intent.

"Whew." As Ning walked through the world of the inner reaches, he'd occasionally disappear without a single sound, then reappear a few hundred thousand kilometers away.

This was how he 'walked'. He had incorporated his training in the Shadowless stance into his way of walking.

"If I didn't have the chance to meditate on the Dao vestiges left behind by so many Eternal Emperors, it would've taken me at least a hundred million years to master this stance," Ning mused. The other four of the five stances of [Brightmoon] required meditation and sudden epiphanies, while the Shadowless stance required Ning to broaden his horizons and gain many new experiences. Thanks to the many Dao vestiges left behind by the Eternal Emperors in this world, Ning managed to comprehend his enhanced stance far more quickly than before.

Every single Dao which Ning possessed would become a Supreme Dao. For instance, his attacking Daos included the Blood Drop sword-intent and the Shadowless sword-intent.

The Blood Drop sword-intent, at its peak, would allow Ning to annihilate all obstacles in his path. Space... time... nothing would be able to par his sword, which would reach incalculable levels of power.

The Shadowless sword-intent, at its peak, would make it so that the enemy would be completely incapable of locating Ning before dying.

.....

“I’ve now developed three of the five true stances of [Brightmoon]. The Soleheart stance and the Heavenbreaker stance are left,” Ning mused. The Soleheart stance would be a defensive Dao, whereas the Heavenbreaker stance would be another offensive Dao. Each of the stances would be fundamentally different from the three which had come before.

“Here I am.” Ning continuously disappearing and reappeared as he advanced at high speeds. He was now moving even faster than his previous maximum speed.

This movement skill of his could be described as the ‘Shadowless’ evasion skill. Most likely, the large majority of Daolords would be unable to catch up to Ning in pure speed. This was why Supreme Daos were so terrifying! Each and every Supreme Dao was utterly unearthly in power. Even if you only came up with one of them, you would definitely become a truly terrifying Daolord in the future.

“The leaders?” Ning stood there, head upraised as he stared at the three sword-wielding figures off in the distance.

In front was the muscular man who was gripping that enormous deep blue greatsword. Behind him was the white-robed man who was carrying a violet sword, a golden sword, and a white sword on his back, and to the side of the white-robed man was the terrifying man who had plunged nine blood-colored swords into the ground before him.

These were the only three experts of the Dao of the Sword who were within the Inner Reaches.

“Three seniors.” Ning bowed respectfully. He felt tremendous veneration towards these experts who had reached such heights in the Dao of the Sword.

Ning began to move forwards. Soon, he could sense a series of invisible ripples spread over his body. If he advanced any further, he would be swept away and taken to the trial grounds. Many dazzling geniuses and Daolords had perished within these trials.

“My opportunity is right before me. How can I possibly shrink back from it?” Ning didn’t hesitate at all as he took one more step forwards.

Whooooosh.

He was completely enveloped by those invisible ripples. This time, Ning didn’t use his Shadowless evasion-art. Instead, he truly disappeared into thin air, having been teleported into the trial-world which had been left behind by these three powers.

Chapter 27: The Abyss of Fiends

At the same time as Ji Ning was entering the trial-world left behind by the three grandmasters of the Dao of the Sword, something else was happening in the outer reaches of the Genesis Lands.

This was region of complete darkness. Only a single source of light could be seen – a solitary figure who stood there, emanating an aura of golden light. This was Prince Greatjoy.

A series of ripples emanated outwards from him, causing spacetime to continuously fluctuate. Even though he had yet to strike, it was evident that the aura of power surrounding him was significantly greater than it had been in the past. He had reached a brand new level.

“True freedom and free will. From this day forth... I, Greatjoy, have truly reached the peak. I am no longer any weaker than Bertulu or Eastcult.” Prince Greatjoy revealed a smile.

When he had journeyed with the others to the primessence chains, Ji Ning and Solewind had managed to pass while he had failed.

Prince Greatjoy was an incredibly proud figure. He accepted his loss with seemingly good grace, but in reality a seed of resentment had been buried deep within his heart that day. Now, he had finally managed to perfectly merge his offensive Dao and his defensive Dao together, resulting in him growing more powerful yet again.

Prior to this, only two members of the World-level cultivators of the Twelve Palaces of the Brightshore Kingdom had been able to reach this level – Bertulu and Eastcult. Now, Greatjoy had joined their ranks!

“The level I have reached is the true apex of power for any World-level cultivator.” Prince Greatjoy nodded slowly. “Now, it no longer matters what mysteries or marvels the Prime Reaches contain. There is nothing that can result in me improving much more. However, I still want to pay a visit to that place. Perhaps I might acquire a few special treasures that will be of use to me once I become a Daolord in the future.”

If he was back home in the Brightshore Kingdom, he probably would've made some simple preparations then immediately broke through to become a Daolord. However, if he did so here in the alternate universe, he would never be able to go back home again.

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Prince Greatjoy had two Supreme Daos. He had now merged them together in a perfect fashion, resulting in him reaching the apex of power.

Heartlord Solewind continued to experience many life-and-death trials within the trial-world left behind by the Heartforce Cultivator leader.

As for Ji Ning? He had just entered the trial-world of those three grandmasters of the Dao of the Sword.

Ning could sense an invisible surge of power spread out and cover him, instantly warping him away.

"Eh?" When he could once again make out his surroundings, he was rather startled.

The area around him was filled with living creatures, as far as the eye could see. He could even make out a giant citadel off in the distance, a citadel that emanated an aura of utterly breathtaking power. Although it didn't affect Ning too much, normal World-level cultivators wouldn't be able to resist the aura at all.

"What's this?" Ning's gaze suddenly fell upon a seemingly-ordinary rock nearby.

This rock was a very ordinary one... but all of a sudden, a series of golden characters began to fly out from within it, as well as a map.

"The Abyss of Fiends has a thirty-six layered world. It was created as a trial ground by three grandmasters of the Dao of the Sword. The twelfth layer, the twenty-fourth layer, and the thirty-sixth layer all have exit tunnels. These are the only ways out, the only ways by which you can leave and return to the Genesis Lands.

"Remember this. Only the strong will win what they desire."

The golden words and the map levitated there in the air for a moment, then quickly disappeared.

Ning turned his gaze while sweeping out with his godsense to scan the area for a billion kilometers around him. The only building in this area was that towering citadel, and the citadel was filled with ten million cultivators, with the three strongest being a trio of World-level cultivators. Those three World-level cultivators were bold, heroic figures, but when they sensed Ning's godsense lock onto them they were horribly frightened.

What powerful godsense!

It must be understood that many years ago, when Ning had visited the Eastsmoke branch of the Bluegrace Sect, he had been able to use his godsense to simultaneously crush the godsenses of more than three hundred other World-level cultivators.

"The three grandmasters died countless years ago, but there are still so many living creatures here within the world they left behind to test their would-be heirs," Ning mused. The reason why he had scanned the area was because he could tell that the restrictive spells covering the citadel didn't seem to be all that powerful.

Whoosh. Ning took a step forward, then completely disappeared.

.....

"Who did that godsense belong to?! It was ridiculously strong. This world is a trillion kilometers in size, but there aren't many with godsense on that level." A golden-robed elder was seated in the lotus position, a frown on his face.

Whoosh.

A white-robed youth suddenly appeared out of nowhere on the seat located next to him. The youth sat there calmly as he stared at the golden-robed expert.

"You..." The golden-robed elder was horrified as he stared at the white-robed youth. "Y-you..."

He was a World-level cultivator! He was someone who stood at the very peak of power within this world. And yet, this youth was powerful enough to appear next to him without him even noticing?

“I have a few questions,” Ning said..

“Please ask them, senior.” The golden-robed elder’s heart was quivering in fear.

“I hope you will not try to lie to me. If you lie... you should be able to guess what will happen,” Ning said.

The golden-robed elder hurriedly smiled. “Senior, if you wished to kill me you could probably do so with a flick of your fingers. This junior would never dare to deceive you or hide anything from you.”

Ning nodded. “I ask you this – have you heard of the Abyss of Fiends?”

“The Abyss of Fiends? I have, of course I have.” The golden-robed elder gave Ning a curious look. Logically speaking, every top-level expert in this world should know about the Abyss of Fiends.

Ning’s gaze hardened.

The golden-robed elder said hurriedly, “This world of ours is a trillion kilometers in size, and powerful experts are as common as the clouds. Many experts have been born over the course of countless years, but the most powerful figures have always been the terrifying devils of the Abyss of Fiends. According to the stories, there are a total of thirty-six levels to the Abyss of Fiends. Countless devils live in that place, and some of them are so incredibly strong that they are honored with the title of ‘fiendlord’.”

“Every single chaos cycle, a large number of devils will charge forth from the Abyss of Fiends under the guidance of a fiendlord and sweep through this world. When this happens, all of the experts within this world must join together if they wish to withstand the assault. But of course, sometimes we will fail. In any case, the devils will have to retreat back into the Abyss of Fiends after a brief period of time.”

Ning frowned. “fiendlord?”

Know thy enemy and know thyself; only then would you be the victor in every battle. The reason why Ning had come to interrogate this local expert was because he wanted to learn more regarding this Abyss of Fiends. This was a trial-world established by three Eternal Emperors, after all, and one of them was on the same level of power as the almighty Hegemon himself. There was no such thing as being too cautious.

“According to the legends, the first twelve layers of the Abyss only hold a single fiendlord. Starting from the thirteenth level, each level shall have many fiendlords within them. The fiendlords are extremely powerful, and it is easy for them to kill us.” The golden-robed elder sighed. “As for what the final twelve levels hold... that is a mystery to us all.”

Ning nodded slowly, as if enlightened.

.....

This world was merely a trillion kilometers in size. After some detailed questioning, Ning came to understand that the strongest experts here were merely at the World level. Those who reached the Daolord level would all vanish without a trace.

“The Abyss of Fiends?” Ning stood at the peak of a mountain, staring off into the distance towards the great black abyss, a circular hole in the earth that was a million kilometers in circumference. The abyss was so deep that there was no way one could see to its bottom. The only thing one could sense was that terrifyingly baleful aura emanating from it.

“So this is the trial which the grandmasters left behind?” Ning revealed a hint of a smile. These so-called ‘trials’ were actually processes of elimination. Major powers were all incredibly proud figures, and thus ordinary cultivators were not qualified to even attempt to peek at their treasures. It must be understood that any of the treasures left behind by Hegemon-level figures would assuredly be valuable beyond price.

“I wonder if I, Ji Ning, will be found worth by the three grandmasters.” Ning transformed into a streak of sword-light, then flew out while using a hint of the Blood Drop sword-intent. The streak of sword-light instantly charged into the Abyss of Fiends.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

A black mist wafted outwards from this place, carrying strange spatial ripples with it.

“Eh?” Ning soon arrived at the first level of the Abyss of Fiends. This first level was a world of volcanos, lava, and endless amounts of blazing light.

Ning swept out with his godsense but wasn't too worried. The first twelve levels only held a single fiendlord, after all. Even the local World-level cultivators would often come adventuring through the first level.

“This leve is roughly ten billion kilometers in size and constitutes a world unto itself. It has more than three hundred devils, each of which has the aura of an ordinary World-level cultivator.” Ning's hands tightened around his sword, Violetjewel.

“Someone has come from the World Above!”

“He actually dares to intrude into our world, the Abyss of Fiends?!”

“Kill him!”

When Ning stretched out with his godsense it instantly attracted the attention of some of the nearby devils, causing them to charge towards Ning. These fiends all belonged to the same race, a race with grayish-black skin, veiny wings, and a pair of sharp claws that glimmered with metallic light. These devils were able to easily surpass the limits of the Heavenly Daos when flying, and the invisible aura of power surrounding them was quite great.

Ning swept the area with his gaze... and his gaze transformed into swords!

A series of sword-intents burst forth, transforming into an enormous Yin-Yang Sword Domain that was like a terrifying grindstone that easily ground away all of the attacking devils. The attacking devils were utterly terrified – this foe was actually able to kill them with just his sword-intent alone?!

Ning, however, was quite calm. These little devils weren't even worthy of him using his Dao lightning or Dao water. Using his intent alone to form the Yin-Yang Sword Domain resulted in a domain which had perhaps only 10%-20% of his full power, but it was enough to effortlessly wipe through these opponents.

Rumble...

The terrifying sword-intent washed out wantonly, easily annihilating all invading devils.

Ning continued to fly downwards, passing through the ground and another layer of black mist before arriving at the second level of the Abyss of Fiends.

Chapter 28: Death Approaches

Ji Ning charged through one level after another, easily battling his way all the way down to the twelfth level. Thus far, he hadn't even needed to draw his sword; his Yin-Yang Sword Domain was enough to sweep through all obstacles.

"Level twelve."

Ning stood atop a hill and was staring off into the distance.

The twelfth level of the Abyss of Fiends was a world of dark-red earth and dark-red mountains. Even the rivers were dark-red in color. The only thing that was different was a pitch-black whirlpool that could be seen off in the distance. The whirlpool was enormous in size and emanated powerful spatial ripples.

"Is that a teleportation tunnel?" Ning recognized it right away. This was a spatial corridor that would allow the user to safely pass through it and leave this place. However... was he supposed to leave before he even encountered any fortunes or opportunities? Ning certainly wasn't willing to resign himself to such a thing!

Ning knew very well that someone making it to the twelfth level meant nothing to those three grandmasters of the sword. Forget about Ji Ning; even some of the local World-level cultivators were able to make it to this level! As Ning had travelled downwards, he had discovered quite a few magic treasures left behind by the locals who had challenged this place.

"This is the twelfth level. There should be a fiendlord here. Supposedly, large groups of fiendlords roam the deeper depths of the Abyss of Fiends, and every chaos cycle there will be a fiendlord who will lead the devils out of the Abyss to assault the world outside. However... since they are often defeated, I imagine that the so-called fiendlords aren't that powerful either." Ning revealed a smile. He really didn't hold these fiendlords in any regard. He spread out his godsense once more, using it to instantly encompass the entire twelfth level.

Once his godsense spread out, it immediately startled awake the devils

on this level as well as an extremely powerful devil... the so-called fiendlord.

A short period of time passed, enough for a kettle of tea to be boiled.

Boom! Ning's sword stabbed through the dark-red skin of a gigantic devil. Previously, the devils all had grayish-black skins. This particular devil was much larger and had dark-red skin; it was a fiendlord!

"Graa... graa..." The fiendlord's throat had been pierced through, but it continued to make those strange yelping sounds as it swiped its sharp claws towards Ning, seeking to dismember him.

Swish! Swish! Swish!

The divine sword in Ning's hands sliced out out in a series of bizarre arcs of sword-light, splitting the fiendlord with three strikes. However, the fiendlord's body then quickly reformed and healed and it let out a furious roar as it once more charged towards Ning. Every single punch and kick it unleashed was filled with incredible power that caused its own body to tremble. Clearly, it didn't have extremely fine, minute control over its power.

Ning, for example, was capable of easily crushing and annihilating the power contained within entire chaosworlds. He was completely surrounded by his sword-light, and none of the power was able to escape at all.

Slash! Sword-light flashed out, resulting in the fiendlord being bisected at the waist once more.

And so, just like that...

Ning first used his Yin-Yang Sword Domain, then his Blood Drop stance, then the Shadowless stance, then his other techniques to repeatedly dominate and clobber the fiendlord for nearly a full hour. Although this was a creature which was born for battle, it had been dominated so effortlessly and ruthlessly that after a full hour, it finally knew fear and chose to flee.

It wasn't too hard to kill a fiendlord, but to frighten it so much that it

would flee for its life? This wasn't easy!

“Mm. This fiendlord's body is fairly tough, probably comparable to that of a Daolord of the Second Step.” Ning nodded slightly. “However... it has an incredibly low level of insight into the Dao. Any random World-level cultivator would be far superior to him in this regard.”

After testing out the fiendlord several times, Ning realized that although a single fiendlord would pose no threat to other monstrously talented World-level cultivators like Prince Greatjoy, in sufficient numbers they would still be dangerous. This was because they had bodies comparable to Daolords of the Second Step, which meant their attack power was dangerously high. Their weakness lay in the fact that their attacks were a bit clumsy and easy to dodge, but with enough attacks they could bury you in a storm of strikes which would be very difficult to deal with.

Still, since Ning had his Yin-Yang Sword Domain as well as seven types of Dao lightning and Dao water, it would be much easier for him to deal with massed fiendlords.

“Time to go.” Bathed in sword-light, Ning began to fly downwards.

Boom!

He easily traversed the ground beneath him, passing through yet another world-membrane and reaching the thirteenth level of the Abyss of Fiends. This was a blood-red world which emanated an endless stench of blood and an alluring aura which sought to guide the hearts of any cultivators here in descending into madness.

Ning's godsense quickly spread out to cover this world. This world only had eight living creatures, all of which were fiendlords.

“GWAAAR!”

“Kill!”

“Kill him!”

The eight fiendlords were all located in separate regions of this world, but they all now flew straight towards Ning. In his previous battle against

a single fiendlord, Ning had thoroughly dominated it for nearly a full hour before it chose to flee. This was a testament to how ferocious and savage these creatures truly were.

“How weak.” Ning held them in no regard at all, easily defeating one of the nearest fiendlords as he flew down towards the fourteenth level.

.....

He continued to fly down one level at a time. His Yin-Yang Sword Domain ensured that these fiendlords were unable to pose any threat to him whatsoever.

Soon, Ning reached the nineteenth level.

Ning had thought that he would go through this level quite easily as well, but when he noticed that this level had an Eternal weapon within it, he immediately knew that things wouldn't be that easy.

“The first thirteen levels held quite a few treasures left behind by deceased cultivators, but those cultivators were probably all locals. At best, their weapons were mostly Dao weapons. From the fourteenth level to the eighteenth level, I saw no treasures at all.” Ning had a solemn look on his face. “But the nineteenth level actually has an Eternal weapon.”

There was no way these locals could possibly forge an Eternal weapon.

Ning scanned the level warily with his godsense. This level merely had nineteen of these fiendlords. It didn't seem to be all that different from the seventeenth level.

WHOOOSH!

Suddenly, an aura of power burst forth from deep within the ground, so powerful as to cause even Ning to be slightly shaken.

He saw the ground split apart, far off in the distance, as a figure suddenly sprang out. This figure was dressed in azure armor and had a mask on, with only his cold eyes being visible behind them. On his back, he was carrying a total of nine blood-colored swords.

“You...” Ning's face turned pale.

He had seen those three grandmasters of the sword in the outside world. The strongest had been comparable to the almighty Hegemon, the towering man who had been wielding that deep-blue greatsword. The other two had been his friends or retainers, and one of them looked exactly identical to the man who had just appeared, except the 'original' version had plunged those nine blood-colored swords into the ground.

"If you can slay me, you will win the nine treasures which Master left behind. Those nine swords accompanied Master for countless years and possess such extraordinary power that they are incredibly close to Universe treasures in power. Even if you do not wish to use them and choose to sell them off... every single sword will fetch you at least fifty million cubes of chaos nectar. If you sell them off as a set, they will be of incalculable value," the azure-armored figure said coldly.

Those nine swords were indeed incredibly valuable... but Ning didn't feel the slightest bit of avarice at all. The entire time, he stared unblinkingly at the azure-armored figure in an incredibly serious manner.

Although the figure spoke of his 'Master', the terrifying aura of the sword-intent residing within his body was absolutely identical to that of the deceased grandmaster outside! Their auras were auras of murder and slaughter, but exalted to a level that surpassed Ning's current level by unfathomable amounts. In fact... Ning felt certain that this was what the sword-intent of a true Eternal Emperor would feel like!

"I'm just at the World level. To be able to beat the fiendlords is one thing, but this guy seems to have a terrifyingly high level of insight into the Dao." Ning had already manifested his [Three Heads, Six Arms], and he gripped his six Eternal swords as he waited solemnly.

"Do not be afraid. These nine swords on my back are not the actual swords which Master used; they are nothing more than nine Dao weapons which Master casually forged before his death." The azure-armored figure walked towards Ning, every step echoing with his killing intent. His every movement felt like the crash of armies and chariots, filled with murder and such despair that even Ning felt breathless.

Ning understood how deadly this would be. Anyone capable of passing the primessence chains and entering the Prime Reaches would be a genius amongst geniuses... but judging from the nineteen Eternal weapons and various storage treasures, more than one person had perished here! And no wonder... this opponent was absolutely terrifying.

“If you slay me, you’ll earn those nine swords which Master used,” the azure-armored figure urged.

Ning’s eyes grew colder and colder. When he had arrived in this world, he had seen that those nine blood-colored swords had been plunged deep into the ground. No one was able to take those swords away! In other words... there had never been any World-level cultivator capable of killing this azure-armored figure!

Rumble...

Ning’s eyes were like ice. Ignoring all else, he instantly unleashed his dazzling Dao lightning and Dao water, transforming them into enormous swords that furiously swept out, instantly turning a region of ten thousand kilometers around him into a terrifying, desolate wasteland of the Dao of the Sword.

As for the azure-armored figures, he didn’t seem to see or hear any of this at all as he continued to walk towards Ning’s direction, towards that wasteland filled with nothing but swords.

Chapter 29: A Fortune

“My Yin-Yang Sword Domain is one of my best killing techniques. Let’s see how it does first.” Ji Ning wanted to use his domain to test his opponent out first.

Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang!

The azure-armored figure suddenly manifested a total of nine arms that reached out and drew those nine blood-colored swords. The nine swords suddenly began to vibrate slightly, in doing so somehow coming together to naturally form a layer of strange sword-light which served as a rippling barrier around him. He slowly strode forwards, delving deeper and deeper into the area of effect of Ning’s domain.

The sword-light barrier formed by those nine swords were able to easily pierce through Ning’s Yin-Yang Sword Domain, almost as if they were fish moving through water.

“W-what...” Ning was in control of the domain, but he felt as though his opponent was as slippery as an eel, making it impossible for him to land a true attack against him.

“He isn’t all that strong; most likely, he’s not even at the World level of power. The problem is that he has a ridiculously high level of insight.” Ning was able to clearly make out every movement the opponent made, but Ning truly found it difficult to understand how those nine swords resonated together to form a rippling barrier of sword-light.

This was a Sword Dao of the Eternal Emperor level. It must be understood that in the Brightshore Kingdom, the Sword Palace didn’t have a single living Eternal Emperor!

“What should I do? How should I deal with him?” Ning was growing rather nervous.

He could sense his opponent wasn’t all that strong, which was what he had expected; if his opponent had the insights of an Eternal Emperor and the strength of a Daolord, there was no way Ning would be able to stand a

chance against him! And yet... while Ning was as fast and as stronger as a Daolord of the First Step, he still felt as though he was completely unable to land any blows against this weaker opponent.

This was the most frustrating part of battling someone who had a higher level of insight than yourself. You might be strong, but you'd have no way of making use of that strength. As for your opponent, he would be able to make his attacks a thousand times more effective than they had any right to be.

"Your Sword Dao domain is actually able to slow me down a bit." The azure-armored figure continued to advance calmly as he spoke. "It isn't bad, actually. However... if this is all you have, you aren't even close to being qualified to win Master's treasures. Better for you to die instead."

He clearly could've advanced quite quickly, but he instead chose to advance at a steady gait.

"Eh?" A flash of light went off inside Ning's head as he stared at the rippling barrier of sword-light... but a moment later, the insight vanished.

They were ten thousand kilometers apart. Although the azure-armored figure walked rather slowly, he reached Ning in just ten short seconds.

"Kill!"

The killing intent in his eyes exploded as all nine of his blood-colored swords began to move.

Whoosh. Whoosh. Whoosh.

The nine swords struck out in a consecutive, orderly fashion, carrying a beautiful but strange rhythm. As the nine swords simultaneously struck out towards Ning, they suddenly transformed into a single enormous blood-colored greatsword. Clearly, the nine had joined together to become one, resulting in them becoming dramatically more powerful as well.

Clang!

Ning emptied his mind of all other thoughts as he used his six Violetjewels to executed the 'Soleheart' stance, transforming the six

swords into six black holes which he used to defend against the attack.

Bang!

Ning's defenses were instantly splintered and destroyed by the clash. He was immediately blown backwards and sent flying, a deep gouge appearing in the earth. This gouge was tens of thousands of kilometers long and many dozens of meters deep.

Ning's face was rather ashen. Not even Greatjoy, Solewind, or any of the others would be able to crush him in such a manner.

"Unacceptable. I have to counter-attack! If I just let him hammer away at me, I'll definitely lose this battle." With a swoosh, Ning transformed into a streak of light and charged forwards, his Yin-Yang Sword Domain once more covering the area.

Faced with the Yin-Yang Sword Domain, the azure-armored figure once more used the nine blood-colored swords he was wielding to form a protective barrier of sword-light that easily protected him from the domain. He raised his head, giving Ning a cold look.

Ning's eyes actually lit up. "Although he's able to resist my domain, he's now moving much slower than before. I, however, am still moving at my normal speed." Ning immediately transformed into a streak of light that once more shot out towards the azure-armored figure.

Swish!

When Ning had charged to within just ninety meters of the azure-armored figure, he suddenly vanished without a trace. Even his sword had completely vanished. [Brightmoon] sword-art, Shadowless stance!

Tchtchtchtch... streaks of sword-light appeared, hidden within the Yin-Yang Sword Domain and completely undetectable. They flew out as chops, slashes, and hacks as they struck out towards the azure-armored figure.

"Mm?" The azure-armored figure raised an eyebrow as the nine swords in his hands trembled slightly.

The protective barrier of sword-light surrounding him began to oscillate,

whittling away at the power of Ning's strikes before completely dispersing them.

Whoosh.

While defending against Ning's attack, the azure-armored figure immediately launched an attack of his own as he once more struck out towards Ning.

"Time to run." Ning did his best to defend while retreating.

"Hahaha..." This time, he was able to retreat with ease. Ning revealed a look of delight. "If I seize the initiative to attack him, he'll have to focus his efforts on defending against me. When he switches to attacks, he'll be just a hair too slow and I'll be able to withdraw. I can't let a foe like this seize the initiative in a battle."

Ning began to attack furiously.

Shadowless sword-intent! It was incredibly ghostly and unpredictable, but the rippling layers of sword-light surrounding the man were still able to block all of Ning's attacks, even though they shook while doing so.

Blood Drop sword-intent! These attacks possessed incredible penetrative power, but it was a straightforward and above-board attack that the opponent could prepare for.

"Attack!"

"Dodge."

Ning clashed against this expert repeatedly. A chance to duel someone who had an Eternal Emperor level of insight in the Dao of the Sword was incredibly valuable

For some strange reason, Ning continued to feel as though a spark of inspiration was floating deep within his mind... but alas, he remained unable to locate it no matter what he did. Now, the more he battled against the opponent, the more he felt as though he was vaguely touching upon it.

"Are these all the techniques you have?" The azure-armored man

suddenly said.

Ning was slightly startled.

“How boring. You haven’t even been able to truly merge your offensive Dao into your defensive Dao.” The azure-armored figure let out a sigh.

Whoosh! He finally made his move.

This was the first time the azure-armored figure’s speed suddenly and dramatically increased. The nine blood-colored swords surrounding him transformed into a curtain of sword-light, and the man himself transformed into an enormous sword. If he previously moved through Ning’s domain like a fish moving through water, he was now like a sword that simply smashed through the domain with terrifying speed. He pounced at Ning, moving far faster than Ning himself could. There was no way Ning could dodge at all. Only now did he realize that his opponent hadn’t used anything close to his real power earlier.

“Chop!” The azure-armored man and his nine swords, in the form of an enormous greatsword, sliced downwards through the air and chopped directly towards Ning.

Ning had no other choices; all he could do was do his best to block the attack.

Bang!

The world seemed to break apart.

Ning was completely blown backwards. His six Eternal weapons were completely unable to defend against this attack, and all of his stances collapsed at first contact. In fact, two of his Violetjewels were actually knocked out of his grip and sent flying.

Rumble...

The ground beneath him shuddered as everything within a region of several hundred thousand kilometers was reduced to dust by the shockwave ripples.

Ning lay there in the giant crater, his fingers twitching numbly. He had

been able to just barely keep a hold over four of his Eternal weapons. The other two had been knocked flying.

“Receive my second chop!” The azure-armored figure said coldly.

But Ning actually had a look of delight on his face... because he had finally realized what that elusive flash of inspiration was. “The sword... in the end, you can’t hold up a house on a single pillar of wood. It needs to be part of a whole...”

“Haha... so that’s how it is! I’m most skilled in defense, but my Soleheart stance has been trapped in a bottleneck for some time now. I’ve come up with two offensive Supreme Daos, but I haven’t been able to truly upgrade my Soleheart stance. Haha...” Ning laughed. His talent for defensive techniques was extremely high, and so he had reached a bottleneck a long time ago during his journeys through the alternate universe.

His offensive techniques had improved nonstop, to the point where he had developed two Supreme Daos for them. And yet, his Soleheart stance had come to a screeching halt.

When Ning first saw his opponent utilize that barrier of sword-light, he had the vague feeling that he had stumbled into a tremendous stroke of luck. Alas, he wasn’t able to truly grasp what he was seeing. As the battle progressed, Ning finally was able to do so.

“A single chopstick can be easily snapped in half. An entire bundle of chopsticks is almost impossible to chop.” Ning couldn’t help but laugh at himself. Sometimes, this was how things worked. Once you were able to see through to the true nature of things, you couldn’t help but marvel at how simple the principle was.

The reason why Ning’s Soleheart stance wasn’t truly able to evolve into a Supreme Dao was because his Soleheart stance was a single-target defensive technique. Ning would use each of his swords to defend, and was able to use a maximum of six swords in this manner at the same time. Each of the six swords worked independently. Of course there was a limit to how much power they could unleash! True, they were cooperating to a certain extent and in the past, Ning had thought that they were working

‘as one’, but now he realized he was wrong. When he saw his opponent use that defensive sword-art, he realized what it truly meant to be working ‘as one’!

He had to do the same thing, to truly fuse everything together. His opponent’s nine blood-colored swords were able to easily merge together to form that barrier of sword-light. When his opponent chose to attack, they were able to easily merge together into an enormous greatsword.

That was what ‘working as one’ truly meant!

“Soleheart stance.”

Ning’s hand swept out, causing the two Eternal swords that had been knocked out of his hands to come flying back to him at high speed.

The six Eternal swords moved simultaneously, each of them exerting the Soleheart stance and beginning to link together. Slowly, the six Eternal swords began to transform and harmonize little by little. Ning had personally watched his opponent use a similar technique and had clashed against him multiple times, allowing Ning to learn some of the key elements. To truly merge the stances together wasn’t as simple as to have all six swords use the exact same stance. Rather, they had to be responsible for different parts of it.

This was much like how a ‘complete’ man would have a nose, a mouth, two eyes, and other body parts.

Ning furiously pulled backwards, doing his best to stay away from his opponent as he tested this new idea out.

BOOM! Ning’s six swords suddenly transformed into a single black hole that completely surrounded Ning, and at the edges of the black hole there was something that looked like a rippling barrier.

“This is the true Soleheart stance. This is finally something worth of being described as a Supreme Dao of defense.” Ning revealed a smile. His Yin-Yang Sword Domain was superb at dealing with groups of attackers, but the Soleheart stance was much better for dealing with a single foe of tremendous power!

Ning had finally comprehended and mastered his Soleheart sword-intent, the fourth sword-intent of his five stances of [Brightmoon]!

Chapter 30: Stop Him!

“Chop!” The azure-armored youth transformed into an enormous streak of sword-light, forcibly shattering a path through Ji Ning’s Yin-Yang Sword Domain. Ning couldn’t help but feel a sense of despair when he gazed upon the sword-light. This was what happened when there was a tremendous disparity in insight and comprehension. The sword-intent of an Eternal Emperor... this really was completely unfair.

Although Ning was mentally shaken, he was still able to stay calm and alert as he unleashed his six swords into the Soleheart sword-intent he had just developed.

Whooooooooosh.

It was like a peacock spreading its feathers, or like leaves swirling in the wind. The six swords moved in unison like a perfect whole, naturally coming together to form a terrifying black hole, with each of the swords playing a specific role in the black hole’s creation.

Boom!

The azure-armored figure’s terrifying sword-light chopped directly against that black hole. Tchtchtch!!! Ning poured all of his power, comparable to that of a Daolord of the First Step, into his new Soleheart sword-intent, allowing it to unleash a simply terrifying level of force that furiously ground away at his opponent’s stance.

BANG!

His opponent’s sword-light began to shudder and twist as it immediately began to fall in power, causing the azure-armored figure to become visible once more. At this moment, the azure-armored figure didn’t hesitate at all, immediately choosing to retreat at high speeds.

The figure stood there in the distance, staring at Ning with some surprise.

“I succeeded. This... this is the true Soleheart stance.” Ning’s heart was filled with joy. This was the true Soleheart stance he had wanted all along.

Six swords striking out in unison, as if they were a part of a single, indivisible whole. If he fought anyone on the same level of power as him, he would be able to completely shut down their attacks.

Even those who were stronger than him and who had a higher level of insight into the Dao would see their attacks dramatically weakened by this defensive technique.

“Hmph.” The distant azure-armored figure let out a cold snort. “Don’t get too smug. You were only able to block me once thus far. Now... take a look at my third chop!”

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Although the azure-armored figure was quite physically weak, his sword-arts were at a terrifyingly high level. Ning had to use all of his power to deal with every single strike, and as a result he was able to increasingly perfect his Soleheart stance.

The two battled for the amount of time needed to boil a kettle of tea, but the azure-armored figure was still unable to do anything to Ning.

“Hey kid. Tell me your name.” The distant azure-armored figure suddenly spoke out in an icy voice.

“I am Darknorth.” Ning smiled as he spoke. He was naturally in a wonderful mood, now that he had developed a new sword-intent.

“Darknorth? Mm. You’ve reached the apex of perfection when it comes to defensive prowess,” the azure-armored figure said. “When you have that sword-intent domain active and spread out, I have to first endure its power if I wish to attack you. This distracts me, resulting in me only being able to unleash 60%-70% of my full power.”

Ning laughed.

His Yin-Yang Sword Domain was highly suited for dealing with group attacks! However, if Ning was dealing with just a single opponent, it would also be highly effective in entrapping and slowing that opponent down, making it so that the opponent’s power lessened! The azure-armored figure needed to constantly ward off the domain via his sword-arts, and so

in battle he was completely unable to unleash his full, peak power.

“And your close-combat defensive skills are also quite formidable. When you combine the two... even I am not able to defeat you.” The azure-armored figure nodded. “I can’t kill you. You may leave now.”

“Leave?” Ning was startled.

The azure-armored figure glanced sideways at Ning, his cold eyes the only thing visible behind that mask he wore. ‘I can’t stop you, which means you can proceed to the next level.’

“Then what about the nine swords which your master left behind, senior?” Ning couldn’t help but ask this question. These were the swords left behind by an Eternal Emperor! Ning had witnessed for himself the terrible power which each sword contained; there was no way any ordinary Eternal weapon could possibly be a match for them. Moreover, when used together they would probably gain certain other special powers as well.

“You actually plan on taking my master’s nine swords?” The azure-armored figure smirked.

“I certainly wouldn’t decline them if you were willing to give them to me,” Ning said with a laugh.

“As I said, if you kill me you will win the nine swords which Master left behind.” The azure-armored figure continued coldly, “Although I can’t kill you, you can’t kill me either. This naturally means you are not worthy of acquiring Master’s nine swords.”

After speaking, the azure-armored figure dove into the ground, disappearing without a trace.

“That was fast.” Ning couldn’t help but laugh. “Was it really necessary for him to run away that fast? It’s not like I’m able to take those swords away from him by force.”

The azure-armored figure had truly been quite terrifying. His attacks were much stronger than Ning’s, and he was significantly faster as well. Thankfully, Ning had the Yin-Yang Sword Domain and his Soleheart stance, two exceedingly strong defensive techniques, which he was able to

use to ward off this tough foe. This was the reason why Ning had survived this trial.

“Time to go.” Ning drilled the ground as well, passing through it to the next, deeper level and the abyss-world it contained.

.....

Ning continued to go downwards through the levels of the Abyss of Fiends. The next few levels were quite simple, as he only had to deal with a few fiendlords. And so, just like that, he made it to the twenty-fourth level.

On the twenty-fourth level, he saw a prominently placed blood-colored estate. Before the estate stood the azure-armored figure, and there was an entire group of fiendlords which surrounded the estate, all of whom appeared to revere the azure-armored figure greatly.

“Greetings again, senior.” Ning flew over then bowed towards the azure-armored figure.

“Mm.” The azure-armored figure nodded, then pointed to an enormous vortex off in the distance. “That over there is the exit tunnel. You can pass through it to reach the outside world. For you to have made it to the twenty-fourth level is already quite impressive. If you choose to leave now, you’ll earn one of my master’s treasures as well as one of his sword-art legacies.”

“A treasure?” Ning asked, “Is it one of the swords?”

“It is not.” The azure-armored figure glanced sideways at Ning. “Those nine swords were my master’s most important treasures, and they will be given to his true successor. You? I suppose you could just barely qualify as an honorary disciple. I’ll give you one of the various random treasures which Master had on him.”

Ning asked, “Senior, isn’t it true that the Abyss of Fiends has a total of thirty-six levels? I’m only at the twenty-fourth level.”

“What, you want to keep going downwards?” The azure-armored figure smiled coldly. “The lower levels are far more dangerous. Be satisfied with one of my master’s treasures and a sword-art legacy.”

Ning shook his head. He had experienced many hardships in order to travel to this alternate universe, including ten thousand years of wandering before even reaching the Genesi Lands! Was he supposed to just leave after merely becoming an honorary disciple of an Eternal Emperor? Ning would have agreed if the man had been willing to give him those nine swords, as a bird in the hand was worth two in the bush, but for one of the random treasures the Eternal Emperor had been carrying?

Ning had acquired an enormous amount of darkspace flamestones. He really didn't care about other treasures. In addition, Emperor Mirrorsnow had given Ning four incredibly valuable golems! The 'random' treasures of this deceased Eternal Emperor probably wouldn't be worth that much.

"I choose to continue," Ning said. "I'll head downwards now, senior."

Whoosh. Ning transformed into a streak of light and disappeared without a trace. His Shadowless evasion skill allowed him to easily pass downwards to the next level.

"This kid..." The azure-armored figure frowned as he watched Ning drill downwards. "He's too self-confident. He insists on going down a path of no return, and I can't even stop him."

Swoosh. The azure-armored figure immediately disappeared as well, moving far faster than Ning had.

.....

The thirty-first level of the Abyss of Fiends.

This place was a place of incredible beauty, filled with singing birds and fragrant flowers. There were no devils here.

A white-robed man was seated at the peak of a towering mountain, a triad of gold-hilted, white-hilted, and violet-hilted swords on his back. He sat there in the lotus position, gazing upon this vast, beautiful world.

"Second brother." A voice rang out. Moments later, the azure-armored figure appeared out of nowhere.

"Third brother. Long time no see." The white-robed man smiled. "Why

have you suddenly come to visit me?”

“I met this kid. He really is quite talented in the Dao of the Sword, and I did exactly as Master instructed. I held nothing back, but I still wasn’t able to kill him.” The azure-armored figure shook his head. “I had a good opinion of him. I felt the kid had a lot of potential, and was good enough to become one of my master’s honorary disciples.”

“Not even you could kill him?” The white-robed man revealed a smile. “Not bad! It is rare for us to encounter such a talented figure.”

“But he insists on going deeper,” the azure-armored man said impatiently. “He obviously doesn’t care about becoming my master’s honorary disciple!”

“I bet he’d listen to you if you were willing to give him those nine swords,” the white-robed man teased.

The azure-armored figure said angrily, “All Master really had were those nine swords. I absolutely won’t give them to anyone until I find the perfect successor for him. This kid isn’t bad, but he’s not even close to being the ideal candidate I’ve been hoping for.”

The white-robed man shook his head. “Well, if he insists on going downwards... what am I supposed to do?”

“Stop him, second brother. Stop him and make him go back,” the azure-armored figure said immediately. “The thirty-sixth level was left behind by the Hegemon personally, just before he died. You know how terrifyingly dangerous it is! Over the course of countless years, there have been a number of self-confident geniuses who refused to listen to me and insisted on going all the way down... and all of them died there.”

When the white-robed man thought of the thirty-sixth level, he couldn’t help but frown.

Their Hegemon had personally created that place. It was the most mysterious and most terrifying place in the entire Abyss.

Their Hegemon was such an incredibly strong figure that even their masters, those two Eternal Emperors of the Dao of the Sword, were willing

to serve as his retainers.

“Ugh. I’ll do my best to stop him, but if I fail... there’ll be nothing else I can do,” the white-robed man said.

Chapter 31: Void Sword Realm

Ji Ning quickly fought his way to the thirty-first floor of the Abyss of Fiends.

“Eh?” Thus far, the Abyss had been a place filled with baleful auras and negative energy. Ning couldn’t help but feel somewhat flabbergasted upon suddenly encountering a level that was filled with flowers and birds, a level which was almost like an otherworldly paradise.

Whoosh.

A white-robed man drifted towards Ning from afar, bearing three swords on his back; one violet-hilted, one gold-hilted, and one white-hilted. He emanated an ephemeral, drifting aura which was similar to that of the clouds in the sky.

A serious look immediately appeared on Ning’s face. Him?

Three grandmasters of the Dao of the Sword had perished outside. The muscular man who wielded that deep blue greatsword was the leader, while the other two Eternal Emperors were his retainers. One was dressed in azure armor, while the other looked just like this white-robed man before Ning.

Appearance, bearing, sword-aura... everything was identical.

“Darknorth?” The white-robed man said.

“Greetings, senior.” Ning bowed.

The white-robed man had a warm look in his eyes as he carefully scrutinized Ning, then smiled. “For you to be able to make it past my second brother means that you are probably quite strong. Unfortunately for you, I’m not my second brother.”

As he spoke, he drew forth the violet sword and the golden sword from his back. As for the white sword, it automatically unsheathed itself and transformed into a streak of white light that floated next to him.

“Be careful, senior.” Ning’s body blurred as he manifested his [Three

Heads, Six Arms], then drew his six Violetjewels.

Boom!

A fierce light flashed through Ning's eyes as his Dao lightning and Dao water immediately burst forth, roaring through the skies and covering an area of ten thousand kilometers around them. The white-robed man was standing fairly close to Ning and was naturally wrapped up within this as well. The lightning-water Yin-Yang Sword Domain possessed truly remarkable amounts of power, and it constantly launched attacks against that white-robed man.

The white-robed man just stood there, not moving at all. And yet, the blurry sword-light emanating from around his body was like a cloud or a mist that easily absorbed and repelled all oncoming attacks.

"Eh? Not good." Ning's heart sank. "The azure-armored man had needed to use those physical nine swords to form a barrier of sword-light to protect him from my domain, but this white-robed man... the light from his sword-intent alone is enough for him to easily defend against me. Clearly, his defensive prowess is far superior to the azure-armored man's."

Ning's guess was correct!

The azure-armored man's specialty lay in attack, in slaughter! Ning had two Supreme Daos of defense, the Yin-Yang Sword Domain and Soleheart sword-intent, and only by combining them was he able to withstand the onslaught. This was a testament to how ferocious the azure-armored man's attacks were.

By contrast, the white-robed man seemed much calmer and gentler.

"The Emperor Sword." The white-robed man instantly transformed into a streak of light as he chopped out towards Ning with the violet sword.

This was an ephemeral, unpredictable chop, but it was so fast that it caused Ning's heart to be gripped in ice. It was simply too fast. His opponent wasn't even as strong as an ordinary World God was, but his sword was simply incredibly fast.

Clang!

Ning hurriedly executed his Soleheart sword-intent, manifesting a black hole which had flickers of sword-light swiveling inside of it. He used this stance to defend against the opponent's chop. It was a good decision. The power contained within the black hole was simply too enormous, allowing it to block the opponent's lethal attack head-on.

"The Killsword." The white-robed man spoke out once more.

Whoosh. This time, he struck out with the golden sword which he wielded in his left hands. The sword carried an aura of incredible sharpness as it pierced straight towards Ning!

This stab was actually somewhat similar to Ning's own Blood Drop stance. However, it was a strike formed from the sword-intent of an Eternal Emperor. When the golden sword struck out, it carried an aura of such terrifying sharpness and destructive power that Ning couldn't help but shudder. However, Ning knew that although the sword-intent itself caused him to uncontrollably shake in fear, the person using it was so incredibly weak that he probably wasn't even at the World level in strength. This enormous disparity in physical power was enough to let Ning make a fight out of it.

Whoosh. He once more used the Soleheart stance to form that black hole. Sword-light once more swiveled and circled within that black hole, allowing him to once more forcibly block his opponent's terrifying attack.

"Your defensive techniques truly are incredible." The white-robed man shook his head and smiled. "As I expected... for you to be able to withstand my third brother means that my own attacks stand even less of a chance."

Although he was superior to his third brother in overall power, his third brother was still stronger in raw attack power.

"If you are able to defeat my third sword, I won't try to stop you," the white-robed man said. The violet sword and golden sword in his hands began to move at the same time... and as for the most important sword of all, that streak of white light that had been hovering around him? It instantly vanished without a trace.

Whoosh...

The violet sword and the golden sword emanated dazzling amounts of light, putting the sun in the skies to shame with their omnipresent radiance. It was like an enormous gauzy cloak of light had covered the entire world, completely covering Ji Ning within its perimeter.

“Break!” The Dao lightning and Dao water continued to rage around Ning, but himself disappeared without a trace as well. He had just used the Shadowless stance. When he next appeared, he was directly in front of that violet-golden gauze of light, and he furiously struck out with his six Violetjewels against the gauze.

Whoosh!

Six streaks of white light suddenly appeared out of nowhere in front of the gauze, easily blocking Ning’s attacks.

“Eh?” Ning felt as though he had just chopped down upon a cloud or a layer of mist. There was nothing for him to exert his power against.

“I refuse to believe it.” Ning once more struck out with his Shadowless stance, launching another silent sneak-attack at another area. Alas, as soon as his attack was about to collide against the violet-golden canopy, streaks of white light once again appeared from the surface of the gauze. The white light was ethereal and ephemeral, giving Ning no way to exert his full force upon it, causing his attacks to fail repeatedly.

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Ning was completely covered by that gauze canopy of violet-gold light, and the streaks of white light hidden within the canopy rendered Ning’s attacks completely fruitless.

“Haha, well done, second brother! You were able to easily trap that young fellow.” The azure-armored figure appeared off in the distance.

“If Master knew that I was using his most powerful killing technique, the Void Sword Realm to simply trap a foe... he’d probably be so insulted that he’d wipe me out.” The white-robed man’s figure appeared within the violet-golden canopy. When he used this technique, he completely merged

himself into the canopy of light itself.

This was the Void Sword Realm, an extremely terrifying sword technique. It was definitely on par with Emperor Mirrorsnow's most powerful strike, the Heartseal stance. Alas, the white-robed figure was merely using it with Elder God level power, making it much weaker. It was just barely capable of trapping a genius like Ning, who was comparable to a Daolord of the Second Step! If an Eternal Emperor used this technique, the entire violet-gold canopy would become completely ethereal, and it would be simplicity itself to use this technique to cover an entire territory!

Swish.

Suddenly, an incomparably sharp streak of sword-light pierced out from within the violet-gold canopy.

"What?!" A hint of shock could be heard in the white-robed man's voice. "How could he be able to pierce through my Void Sword Realm?! Third brother, why does he have such a terrifyingly strong sword-art?" The white-robed man roared.

"Ah?! He does have an extremely strong sword-art that carries tremendous destructive, penetrative power," the azure-armored man said hurriedly. "Even I have to face that attack head-on in order to block it."

"Damn!" The white-robed man grew furious and frantic.

The Void Sword Realm created an ethereal world which was unmoved by raw power. It could completely absorb even the most savage of strikes! Although the Shadowless stance of Ning's [Brightmoon] sword-arts was rather strange, it simply wasn't strong enough to overcome the world's defenses. As for the Soleheart stance or the Yin-Yang Sword Domain, they were defensive techniques. But the Blood Drop stance... this was Ning's most penetrating attack of all.

Even if Ning did come up with a Heavenbreaker sword-intent in the future, his Blood Drop stance would still have the greatest penetrative power.

It was an attack which destroyed everything in its path, which pierced

through all things which sought to bar its way!

The Void Sword Realm wasn't truly perfect and flawless. Perhaps only someone on the level of a Hegemon would be able to make it truly perfect... and its one weakness was to attacks that had tremendous penetrative power.

Whoosh!

After Ning discovered that his Blood Drop stance was the perfect counter to the violet-gold gauze before him, he struck out three times in a row. His stabs blasted a hole through the canopy before him, and he immediately transformed into a streak of light and flew out of that hole.

The enormous violet-gold canopy instantly disappeared, transforming back into that white-robed man. The three swords the man had been using all flew back into the sheaths he was carrying on his back.

The white-robed man stared at Ning, a complicated look in his gaze.

The Blood Drop stance truly was the perfect counter to the Void Sword Realm. But of course, at present Ning's Blood Drop stance was still rather raw and unpolished; the only reason it had succeeded was because the white-robed man's level of power was limited to the Elder God level. Still, if Ning ever reached the Eternal Emperor level and was able to upgrade his Blood Drop stance to that level as well, he would be able to use it to defeat the Void Sword Realm as used by the Eternal Emperor who had created it.

"There is a counter and a complement for every sword-art." The white-robed man sighed. "You were actually able to come up with a sword-art that perfectly countered mine. I truly don't know if this was a blessing or a curse for you."

"Darknorth." The distant azure-armored figure spoke out as well. "Both my second brother and I wish for you to stop here. You truly are quite talented. We really don't want to see you throwing your life away on the thirty-sixth floor."

"Throwing my life away?" Ning frowned.

The azure-armored man said, "Just listen to me. My sword-arts and my second brother's sword-arts all come from our respective masters. Although our masters were Eternal Emperors, they weren't at the Hegemon level. Master's sword-arts were never truly perfected, but the Hegemon's... his sword-arts were truly perfect and without flaw."

"You are skilled in defense, making it so that I can do nothing against you."

"Your sword-arts possess tremendous penetrative power, allowing you to defeat the Void Sword Realm."

"But if you were to go to the thirty-sixth level, you will realize that your sword-arts are all completely useless." The azure-armored man shook his head. "You'll die in despair! Over the course of countless ages, there have been quite a few monstrously talented World-level geniuses who were able to make it past myself and my second brother, but all of them died on the thirty-sixth floor."

Ning was stunned. What?! There had been multiple individuals who had made it past the azure-armored man and the white-robed man, only to die on the thirty-sixth level?

"I urge you to give up," the white-robed man said. "If you go back now, you can return to the exit tunnel on the twenty-fourth floor. I'll give you one of my own master's treasures as well! I'll also transmit my master's sword-arts legacy to you."

Chapter 32: Sixth Level of the Abyss of Fiends

The white-robed man also viewed Ji Ning with great favor. Although there had been other geniuses who had been able to make their way deep into the Abyss of Fiends, he could count on one hand the number of geniuses who had been able to force their way path both himself and his third brother.

Both he and his third brother wished for Ji Ning to become honorary disciples of their two masters.

“A treasure? And just ‘honorary’ disciple?” Ning asked.

“Yes.” The white-robed man nodded. “According to master’s instructions... he will accept one personal disciple and six honorary disciples. Although I like you, you aren’t even close to meeting the standard necessary to become Master’s personal disciple.”

Ning felt rather disappointed. Still, he understood that because these three Eternal Emperors were already deceased, they would be extremely careful in selecting their legacy disciples. Emperor Mirrorsnow was still alive; even though he was taking on a total of ten personal disciples, every single disciple would only be given a set of four Daolord golems. These three Eternal Emperors, however, were giving all of their most important treasures to a single personal disciple.

“Can you at least tell me what the thirty-sixth level holds?” Ning asked.

“Our masters once followed and served our Hegemon,” the azure-armored figure growled. “Do you know what the exalted title of ‘Hegemon’ means? It means that they are able to rule over all other things.”

Ning nodded. Of course he knew. The Brightshore Kingdom had a Hegemon. His entire homeland of the Endless Territories only had three Hegemons in total!

“To inherit everything a Hegemon left behind...ahaha! I once encountered someone who was even more talented than you in the Dao of

the Sword. He had perfectly merged his offenses and his defenses into a truly perfect whole.” The azure-armored figure sighed. “I was willing to let him become my master’s personal disciple, but he was too proud. He chose to go the thirty-sixth level instead.”

Ning was stunned. Apparently, that genius of the Dao of the Sword was on the same level as Bertulu and Eastcult.

“But he still died on that level.” The azure-armored figure shook his head.

“Give up.” The white-robed man looked at Ning.

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Ning stood there silently.

Should he give up? Even those more talented than him had perished on the thirty-sixth level.

“A Hegemon’s legacy lies there... the legacy of someone who was on the same level as the almighty Hegemon of the Brightshore Kingdom.” Ning’s eyes slowly began to blaze with resolve and a desire to fight. “Why have I left the Three Realms and braved the dangers of the Endless Territories? Why have I chosen to go on so many deadly adventures? It is all for the sake of being able to bring her back to life! I dream of the day when the three of us... her, me, and Brightmoon... will once more be able to live together as a family.”

Ning’s deepest desire was to bring his entire family back again. It was this stubborn desire which kept him going, which made him strive so hard.

“To reverse the flows of spacetime and bring her back to life will be incredibly difficult. If I let myself be filled with fear, I probably won’t be able to make it to the apex of power and won’t be able to convince someone like the Hegemon to bring her back the life.”

“What’s more... even if I fail my attempt at the thirty-sixth level, I’ll merely lose one of my clones. I can rebuild it eventually.” All hesitation vanished from Ning’s gaze.

He was going to charge straight down his path. No one would be able to stop him!

“Darknorth?” The white-robed man and the azure-armored figure both looked at Ning, awaiting his decision.

“Forgive me, seniors.” Ning murmured softly, “I still wish to continue.”

“What if you die? You won’t regret it?” The white-robed man asked.

“No regrets,” Ning replied. He then transformed into a streak of light and tore through the ground, diving through to the next level.

The azure-armored man and the white-robed man both let out long sighs as they watched Ning leave.

“I knew he would choose this path. Every single person who has developed their own Supreme Dao is filled with terrifyingly strong resolve,” the white-robed man said.

In the end, fortuitous occurrences were external sources of power. When the strong rose to power, it was the stubborn will and resolve in their heart which drove them to continue forwards.

If you didn’t have an almost insanely stubborn desire to accomplish a certain something, it was virtually impossible for you to be able to stand at the apex of power in this vast universe. Even if you were incredibly talented and had many tremendous strokes of luck, if you didn’t have a terrifyingly amount of determination there was no way you’d be able to make it to the top.

An infatuation.

A desire.

A regret.

A longing.

All sorts of emotions could be transformed into a determined will.

“Ugh. He’ll probably die on this path he has chosen. But if he doesn’t die, he’ll definitely become one of the most dazzlingly talented figures in

this vast universe, someone who countless other cultivators will willingly submit to,” the azure-armored figure said.

.....

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

Ning continued downwards through the various levels. These levels in the Abyss only contained fiendlords. In the end, Ning managed to make it all the way to the thirty-sixth level, the deepest level of the Abyss of Fiends.

Whoosh.

Ning stood there gracefully in midair, staring at this bottommost level of the Abyss of Fiends.

Gugugu...

This was a world of volcanos, and Ning was able to see three towering volcanos located in three different parts of this world. Each of the volcanos continuously belched out plumes of fire and lava which flowed out throughout this world. Due to the terrifying degree of heat, the bubbling lava would continue to bubble and hiss for a very long period of time before slowly solidifying into volcanic rock.

“Eh? Where’s the exit tunnel? Why isn’t there an exit tunnel on this level?” Ning was searching for the exit tunnel for this level, but was able to find nothing.

Suddenly, the earth began to tremble.

Ning immediately turned his gaze off into the distance. The vast earth, covered with flowing streams of lava, was shaking. Slowly, the earth began to split apart as an ancient, towering shrine began to gradually emerge from underground. The shrine was a deep blue color, and it was covered with strange diagrams. In front of the shrine stood a towering figure.

The towering figure stood there silently, hands clasped around a deep blue greatsword. He stared at Ning from afar, and his gaze alone made Ning feel as though an entire world was crashing down upon him. That

stare alone made Ning feel as though this man was absolutely invincible.

“Him? His aura is absolutely identical to that Hegemon’s aura.” Ning remained very calm and composed.

“Another challenger has come?” The muscular man standing in front of the shrine glanced at Ning, his eyes extremely cold and calm. He said in a flat voice, “Kill him, children.”

“Kill him, children.” His deep voice boomed throughout every inch of this world, echoing again and again.

Ning was stunned upon hearing this. ‘Children’? But it didn’t seem as though the thirty-sixth level had any other living beings within it.

“Yes.”

“Yes.”

“Yes.”

Three booming voices instantly burst forth from within the three towering volcanos.

Those massive volcanos actually began to move, and as they moved they quickly began to transform into similarly towering volcano titans! All three volcanos had transformed into three enormous volcano titans.

The three volcano titans had pitch-black forms, but Ning could sense the blazing, flaming power which filled their bodies. Their eyes were flowing pools of lava, and every single one of them seemed to possess the power of an enormous world. Just looking at them, Ning felt certain that they were far physically stronger than he was.

After the three volcano titans appeared, they first turned towards the distant, muscular, grim-faced man who stood in front of the shrine. All three went down to one knee.

The muscular man nodded.

“Kill!” Only then did the three volcano titans rise to their feet and charge towards Ning.

Their galloping paces caused the earth to tremble. They left enormous footsteps in the ground, and their glares made Ning feel rather startled.

“But so what if they are strong? From the looks of them, they are Aberrants that were formed from or out of volcanos,” Ning mused. “They are probably much weaker than me in terms of insights into the Dao.”

Ning manifested three heads and six arms, then drew his six Eternal swords.

Rumble...

The seven streams of Dao water and Dao lightning all surged forth, filling an area of ten thousand kilometers with sword-light formed from lightning and water.

Boom! The volcano titan closest to Ning charged into Ning's Yin-Yang Sword Domain. Although sword-light repeatedly hacked down upon his volcanic form, the attacks were only able to leave behind a few white marks on its rocky skin. It barely paused at all, not slowed in the slightest as it continued to charge forwards with heavy steps.

Ning wanted to see exactly how physically strong these volcano titans were, and so he first chose to fight it in a head-on clash through using his most penetratively powerful attack, the Blood Drop stance.

Six streaks of sword-light shot out like an enormous meteor shower that shot out towards that terrifying stone hand.

Boom! The giant stone hand howled as it flew through the air. It crushed the six streaks of sword-light, then slammed directly onto Ning. This time, it was Ning who was knocked flying backwards like a meteor.

As Ning flew backwards, he forcibly twisted himself upright and landed on the ground. The earth shudder from the collision, caving in for an area of a million kilometers as an enormous basis suddenly appeared.

Ning rose to his feet, his face rather ashen.

“A single volcano titan is already this much stronger than me... and there are three? And these are just the ‘children’?” Ning finally could

sense that death was approaching. Finally, he realized why no one had ever been able to survive the thirty-sixth level.

Chapter 33: The Five Sword-Intent of [Brightmoon]

“Kill!” The other two volcano titans howled as they charged forwards, each seeming just as valiant and mighty as the first. Their thunderous steps were as heavy as the mountains, but they moved faster than the limits of the Heavenly Daos. Although each of their punches and strikes seemed rather ungainly to Ji Ning, they carried enough power to truly overmatch him.

“I refuse to believe I can’t even take care of the three ‘children’.” Ning’s body constantly blurred, disappearing and reappearing thanks to the Shadowless stance, and every so often he would rely on his superior agility to throw out rope treasures and other treasures to slow down his foes.

Using your strengths to attack your opponent’s weaknesses. This was the way of combat!

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The muscular, greatsword-wielding man continued to stand there in front of the distant shrine, a cold look in his eyes as he watched all this happen. Right at this moment, two new figures suddenly descended; the white-robed man and the azure-armored man.

“Big brother.” The white-robed man and the azure-armored man both spoke out.

“Mm.” The muscular man acknowledged them calmly.

“The kid’s able to hold his own against the combined attacks of three volcano titans. He really isn’t bad.” The azure-armored figure glanced at the distant Ning, then smiled. “Big brother, would you agree that this kid is worth us spending some effort teaching?”

The muscular man said coldly, “Far from it. He’s merely relying on a few defensive tricks to stay alive. Once my children unleash their ultimate attacks, he’ll definitely die.”

“Are you just going to watch him die?” The white-robed man asked hurriedly.

“He might’ve developed two offensive Supreme Daos and two defensive Supreme Daos, but so what?” The muscular man said coldly, “He hasn’t been able to truly join them together... he’s not even worth me giving advice to.”

The azure-armored man and the white-robed man exchanged a glance, then shook their heads helplessly.

“Big brother, you really have set your expectations too high. Remember that guy, all those years ago, who had perfectly fused his offensive Dao and his defensive Dao? You ended up personally kill him!” The azure-armored man muttered.

“Hmph. That’s because he was too stupid. I personally gave him pointers on what to do, but he still wasn’t able to improve at all. He deserved to die.” The muscular man continued, “And even if he did have a so-called flawless union of an offensive Supreme Dao and defensive Supreme Dao, what of it? It must be understood that advancing forwards on such a path is incredibly difficult. Each step will be taxing, and the final step of completing the Daomerge and gaining eternity will be unspeakably arduous.”

“Over the course of countless years I’ve seen many dazzlingly talented figures who, as Daolords of the Fourth Step, were capable of killing weaker Eternal Emperors. Almost none of them, however, are capable of succeeding in their Daomerge and gaining the power of a Hegemon.” The muscular man shook his head. “Master is already dead. He can only accept a single personal disciple and two honorary disciples. There’s only three slots total. I have to be incredibly cautious when doling them out. Even an honorary disciple has to be both a perfect candidate as well as have a Dao which is very similar to my master’s Dao. As for becoming a personal disciple? Only someone who can receive the acknowledgment of my master’s Eternal weapon and make it voluntarily wish to serve him is qualified be given that position!”

“You really do have high expectations.”

“Excessively high expectations.”

The white-robed man and the azure armored man both shook their heads. After their masters had perished, they had only met a single genius who had been able to truly and perfectly merge an offensive Supreme Dao and a defensive Supreme Dao... and in the end, the muscular man had personally killed him! He hadn't even been willing to hand over a position of honorary disciple.

“Master decided to only accept two honorary disciples. I'm willing to bet that the personal disciples of the leader of the Church of Annihilation are given less than my master has prepared for his two honorary disciples,” the muscular man said coldly.

In the end, the term ‘disciple’ was just a titular one. What really mattered was what the teacher and master had prepared! There was only so much a living Hegemon would give; there was no way he would bestow his most important treasures to someone else. Only a dead Hegemon would be so truly selfless as to hand over all of his treasures!

.....

The three volcano titans stood in three different directions as they surrounded and attacked Ning. Ning no longer dared to face them head-on, as the volcano titans possessed overwhelming levels of brute strength. Worse, he was completely incapable of damaging their volcanic bodies. Not even his Blood Drop stance could punch through them! For now, he could only rely on his Soleheart sword-intent to buy himself some time. Ning also used his rope-type magic treasures to try and tie down one of the volcano titans. Ning believed this to be his only method for capturing and subduing them.

“Kill!”

“Kill!”

They used the most elementary, simple of attacks. Sometimes, they would swing their giant rocky hands. Other times, they would raise their

fists high in the air, then smash downwards towards the ground. Every so often, they would bring both arms to their chests, then make a sudden pushing motion towards Ning. The attacks were simple but filled with speed and savagery, causing Ning to be at a complete disadvantage in this fight.

“Mm. Although they use similar techniques, it seems as though there are some differences.” Ning realized that there was something off with these three volcano titans. One of them was faster and more explosive while the second always attacked with both hands. As for the third, he was the slowest of the three; he would spend quite a bit of time building up power before each attack, but the attacks he unleashed were incomparably devastating.

“Although their attacks aren’t exactly the same, they seem to share certain similarities.” Ning was slowly mesmerized by the possibilities. From their attacks, he was able to see some of the things he himself had been searching for but unable to truly master.

Slowly, as the battle continued Ning began to gain a few insights into the various battle stances that the three volcano titans used. But of course, he was only able to gain a few. The three volcano titans were very crude in using these techniques, after all.

“The Heavenbreaker stance...”

Right now, the only stance remaining was the Heavenbreaker stance!

The five stances of [Brightmoon]. He had already developed Supreme Daos based on the other four stances. Only the Heavenbreaker stance was left.

The Heavenbreaker stance was the most ferocious of stances, containing truly wild and berserk levels of power. It used overwhelming power to crush all foes and was Ning’s most physically powerful attack. It was the perfect solution for dealing with foes whose defenses simply couldn’t be pierced through or penetrated.

The Shadowless stance focused on being fluctuating and unpredictable; this naturally caused the power of the actual attacks to be somewhat

weaker.

The Blood Drop stance destroyed everything in its path, letting it pierce through all which would oppose it.

These two stances had both reached the apex in their respective fields... but both had made sacrifices in terms of total, raw power! Only by focusing in one area could one reach the apex in that area, after all.

The Heavenbreaker stance didn't have a terrifying penetrative ability, nor was it unpredictable in the slightest. It was simply an awesome, direct attack that contained the strongest levels of power possible.

"Mm... ah! Is that how it is?" Ning's battle against the three volcano titans grew increasingly frenzied, and he continued to secretly learn from their striking techniques.

This furious battle persisted for roughly the amount of time needed to boil a kettle of tea.

"Time for the final attack." The distant azure-armored figure and white-robed figure both let out soft sighs. They had grown accustomed to seeing this long ago. The strongest attack which these three volcano titans had was actually a single attack that was combined from three different attacks. Once they joined together to form the final attack, they would be able to unleash the most powerful killing strike they were capable of.

The power of that attack was terrifyingly great! If you did not have a truly perfect Dao, it was all but guaranteed that you would perish from it. And even if you did have a perfect Dao... it was likely that their 'big brother' would personally attack and kill you!

.....

After battling furiously for the time needed to boil a kettle of tea, the movements of the three volcano titans suddenly changed.

"Eh?" Ning's face tightened slightly.

Whoosh! One of the volcano titans suddenly lifted up his enormous stone hands, preparing to slam downwards towards Ning. The second

volcano titan slowly advanced, both hands in front of his chest as he prepared to make a shoving motion. The final volcano titan began to prepare to swing his arms towards Ning...

The rhythm of the battle had changed. The attacks of the three volcano titans had joined together to form a whole, and the power of their attacks actually began to rise.

Ning instantly understood what he was seeing. This was much like how he perfectly merged his six Eternal swords together when using the Soleheart sword-intent. In this moment, the three volcano titans had truly merged together, and the power of this attack would definitely be ten times greater than their previous ones. Ning had already been at a complete disadvantage. For their attack power to increase tenfold... he was going to get crushed!

“AH!” Ning’s eyes suddenly lit up. “T-this... this is how the Heavenbreaker stance should be!” A look of wild joy suddenly appeared within his eyes as he stared at the three volcano titans.

In truth, the three volcano titans were using one of the techniques which the Hegemon had developed. This technique was 70%-80% similar to Ning’s Heavenbreaker stance.

When Ning had watched and sparred with the volcano titans, he had gained a number of new insights. Given that his Heavenbreaker stance had already reached a bottleneck and only needed one final push to break through to a new level... once the three volcano titans joined forces, Ning suddenly understood it all.

A warhorse needed enough space to gallop before it could reach its maximum velocity.

A bow needed to be drawn to a full arc before it would reach maximum power.

Hints of the truth to this Dao could be seen throughout the mortal world.

The Heavenbreaker stance... if you wanted to release the full, terrifying

level of power it contained, you would need to first build up power! For example, in archery you would build up power by drawing your bow... and then let it explode forth with its full might, like a volcano erupting! Only by building up enough might would you be able to unleash the full power of your attack! But just as importantly, the moment you unleashed your power had to be fast, fierce, and compressed into a short instant.

This... this was what a Heavenbreaker stance should look like.

“Heavenbreaker.” Ning made his move. He raised all six of his arms high into the air, filling his Violetjewels with his divine power and causing them to instantly skyrocket in weight.

Ten times. Ten thousand times. A trillion times...

The six Violetjewels each became as heavy as a chaos star! This was approaching the maximum level of weight which Ning was currently able to control. The Heavenbreaker stance was ideally executed with extremely heavy weapons, such as the deep blue greatsword of the deceased Hegemon. That was actually an incredibly dense and unique weapon which was perfect for using the Heavenbreaker stance.

Chapter 34: Sword Dao Samsara

Ji Ning's six Violetjewels all chopped towards his opponents at the same time, and as they moved forwards they crushed everything in their path, causing space itself to tremble and distort. They moved forwards in seemingly slow arcs, but their power only continued to grow until they reached a crescendo of might, then slammed head-on into the giant stone fists of a volcano titan.

The power now contained within every single one of Ning's six swords was stronger than when he previously used all six swords combined to execute the Blood Drop stance. This was the difference between the Heavenbreaker stance and the Blood Drop stance!

In terms of penetrative power, the Blood Drop stance was far superior to the Heavenbreaker stance... but it was still useless against these volcano titans, who had bodies that were comparable to precious treasures. But in terms of raw power, the Heavenbreaker stance was similarly far superior to the Blood Drop stance. It was perfect for head-on clashes!

BOOM!

The enormous volcanic body of the volcano titan shuddered violently, and he couldn't help but stumble back quite a few steps. Even his giant stone hands were visibly trembling.

"Kill!"

"Kill!"

Ning was clearly much faster and more agile than the volcano titans. He only had to deal with one of them each time.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

A series of explosions rang out as the towering volcano titans were knocked stumbling backwards one by one, thanks to Ning's overwhelming power. Although the volcano titans bellowed furiously and charged forwards repeatedly, Ning was able to beat them back each time. Ning was physically much smaller than them, but the power of his Heavenbreaker

stance allowed him to completely outstrip them and shut them down.

“Eh?” An odd, surprised look appeared on the formerly emotionless face of the muscular, greatsword-wielding man who stood in front of the distant shrine.

“Is that...?!” The white-robed man and the azure-armored man next to him both revealed looks of joy.

“Big brother, that Sword Dao... isn’t that just like the Dao of the Hegemon, a Dao that overwhelms and crushes all foes in a straightforward manner?” The azure-armored man said hurriedly, “Darknorth is a perfect fit for learning the Hegemon’s Dao of the Sword.”

The muscular man calmly shook his head. “Although he’s developed five Supreme Daos, he hasn’t been able to link them together in a perfect manner. He’s not even qualified to become my master’s honorary disciple.”

The deceased Hegemon would only accept one personal disciple and two honorary disciples. Not even that now-deceased World-level genius who had perfectly fused an offensive Supreme Dao with a defensive Supreme Dao had been able to qualify as an honorary disciple. In fact, the muscular man had personally slaughtered him!

“Big brother, your requirements are too stringent. The Sword Dao this kid has come up with is extremely similar to that of the Hegemon’s,” the azure-armored man said frantically. “There are incredibly few such geniuses of the Dao of the Sword. If you kill him, who knows how long it will be before we encounter another one?”

“I’d rather have no successors at all than poor ones.” The muscular man shook his head. “If I am to choose a successor, I will only choose a perfect one.”

“A perfect one?”

“Big brother, you... ugh.”

The white-robed man and the azure-armored man both shook their heads. But right then, both their bodies trembled. Even the muscular man

was somewhat astonished as he stared at what was happening.

“What?!” The white-robed man and the azure-armored man called out this word at the same time.

“How could he have made yet another breakthrough so quickly?” A look of true astonishment was on the muscular man’s cold features as well.

After Ning developed the Heavenbreaker stance, he immediately found the battle against the three volcano titans was now much easier than before. Thanks to the Shadowless evasive skill and the Blood Drop evasive skill, he was far more agile than his opponents. Defending was inherently easier than attacking, but now his attacks carried crushing power as well.

It was an absolutely delightful feeling. But just as Ning was battling to his heart’s content, he suddenly had the vague feeling that his five sword-intents could actually be linked together in some manner.

“Is this...” Ning suddenly realized that there were certain aspects of his five sword-intents that resonated with each other and attracted each other. They made up for each other’s weaknesses, and in fact it could be said they all stemmed from the same source.

The Dao of the Sword...

Although it was awesomely vast, different aspects of it could lead to different directions of development. Ning’s starting point was the essence of the sword itself, and he had divided it up into five different aspects that he believed included all types of sword-arts the Dao of the Sword could contain. His five aspects were the Blood Drop sword-intent, the Shadowless sword-intent, the Heavenbreaker sword-intent, the Yin-Yang sword-intent, and the Soleheart sword-intent. These five types of sword-intent, when separated thusly, truly did encompass all possible elements and aspects of all sword-arts.

These five types of sword-intents were, in truth, five parts of the complete Dao of the Sword.

When Ning had developed his first, second, third, and fourth sword-intents, he hadn’t realized this. But now that he had developed his fifth

sword-intent, this battle instantly caused him to realize that there were deep, inextricable connections between his five sword-intents.

“The five sword-intents can be completely joined together.” And so, Ning naturally began to do just that.

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He was unlike all other geniuses. Bertulu, Eastcult, Prince Greatjoy... they hadn't actually truly understood or mastered all aspects of their chosen paths.

Eastcult had merely come up with a single offensive Dao and a single defensive Dao. When he managed to join them together in a perfect manner, his power increased dramatically! But of course, joining together two Supreme Daos was incredibly difficult.

The same was true for Prince Greatjoy. He too had only comprehended a pair of Supreme Daos, eventually joining them together here in the Genesis Lands of this alternate universe.

As for Bertulu, he was a bit stronger than the other two, having mastered and joined together a trio of Supreme Daos.

But...

Imagine a porcelain plate which had been shattered into five bizarrely-shaped pieces. Eastcult and Greatjoy had merely mastered two of those pieces. Thanks to their tremendous intelligence and wisdom, they had managed to find a way to jam these two pieces together into a complete whole, albeit with great difficulty, and use the joined pieces to form their Daos.

Bertulu had been able to take control over three pieces, and had also had to work incredibly hard to join them together.

But Ji Ning?

He had mastered all five pieces, allowing him a degree of understanding of every single aspect of the Dao of the Sword. It was as though he had acquired all five pieces of that shattered porcelain plate. He didn't need to

waste time and effort finding out a way to make them fit together; they fit together in a natural manner, because they represented the five parts of the full Dao of the sword.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Ning's sword... began to change. It was no longer limited to any specific stance.

Whoosh. He unleashed a sword that was almost invisible to the naked eye, a traceless and shadowless sword. And yet, when it appeared before the volcano titan it suddenly transformed into a swirling black hole of sword-light that dragged the volcano titan sideways. This had all happened too suddenly, and the volcano titan couldn't help but stumble off-balance.

It was like he was toying with a child.

Boom. Whoosh! Boom.

Ning strode amidst the three volcano titans, his five mighty sword-intents having joined together to form a cyclical sword-intent, a Samsara sword-intent. His five mighty sword-intents were like five wooden spokes that now came together to naturally form a perfect wheel! This naturally-forming cycle allowed the different types of sword-intent to mutually reinforce and strengthen each other.

For example, Ning could first initiate the Heavenbreaker sword-intent. Once he built up enough power, he could suddenly transform it all into his Blood Drop sword-intent, giving it an even more terrifying degree of penetrative power.

The Blood Drop sword-intent's incredible speed, in turn, could be transferred into the Heavenbreaker sword-intent, giving its ponderous strike a terrifying level of speed that only made it even more powerful than before.

Ning's five mighty sword-intents flowed in a perfect cycle. As the saying goes, where water flows a canal shall naturally form. Just like that, the five mighty sword-intents easily came together to form a perfect cycle, the

Samsara sword-intent.

.....

“Five Supreme Daos? Just like that, he merged them together?” The azure-armored man muttered to himself, “Don’t you dare fight with me over him. Please oh please, don’t fight with me over him. He’s going to be my master’s personal disciple!”

“Third brother, Darknorth didn’t choose to leave when he reached the twenty-fourth floor. Clearly, he gave up the right to become your master’s disciple. As per the rules that were set down, you are responsible for the first twenty-four floors while our big brother and I are responsible for the final twelve floors,” the white-robed man said immediately. “Our big brother is incredibly strict when it comes to choosing a successor. So what if this kid has perfectly joined his Supreme Daos together? There’s no way our big brother will be interested in him. So, I think the best solution is to have him become my master’s personal disciple.”

Countless aeons ago, those three grandmasters of the Dao of the Sword had perished. For endless years, the three of them had abided by the orders of their master and had waited here in the hopes of finding successors.

However... finding suitable successors was simply far too difficult. Although Ji Ning had displayed a certain degree of talent, none of the three had been truly impressed by him. He hadn’t even been able to perfectly join any of his Supreme Daos together! Give him the treasures left behind by their Eternal Emperors masters? Preposterous!

But now, Ning had perfectly joined together FIVE different types of Supreme Daos! Looks of blazing desire instantly filled the eyes of the white-robed man and the azure-armored man. If looks could release energy, their gazes were so heated that Ji Ning would’ve instantly melted into a puddle.

“Hmph.” The muscular man let out a cold snort.

“Big brother, I’m certain that there’s no way someone as strict as you would be interested in him,” the white-robed man said hurriedly.

“So what if he has five Supreme Daos? So what if he’s perfectly joined them together? In the end, he’s still nothing more than a World-level cultivator.” The muscular man continued coldly, “The more difficult a Dao one chooses, the more difficult the path a Samsara Daolord shall have. With each step, a Samsara Daolord must straddle the line between life and death. This is especially true with regards to the Daomerge. Every era has given birth to monstrously powerful Daolords, but how many of them have been able to gain eternity and become Hegemons? Don’t be fooled by how talented this Darknorth kid seems to be; I’m afraid that he has almost no chance of succeeding in his Daomerge in the future.”

There were many monstrously powerful Daolords; every single generation would give birth to a few. But...

Even the Endless Territories had only given birth to three Hegemons over the course of its entire history. The muscular man’s words were spot-on; to succeed in the Daomerge and gain true eternity was simply far too difficult for these monstrously talented geniuses.

“So... don’t be overly infatuated with him,” the muscular man said coldly.

“In other words, big brother, you aren’t interested in him, right?” The azure-armored man said.

“If that’s the case, then he’ll definitely become my master’s personal disciple,” the white-robed man said hurriedly.

Chapter 35: A Clash

“I’m not finished talking!” The muscular man was rather irritated.

The azure-armored man and the white-robed man exchanged a glance, then the azure-armored man said, “Big brother, what are you saying? I thought you didn’t care about this Darknorth kid. Are you seriously going to fight with us over him?”

“Big brother, I’ve memorized every single word you said just now,” the white-robed man said.

It had been far too long. They had been waiting here per the orders of their respective masters for far, far too long. Ji Ning was the first one to truly drive them wild with excitement. Although there had been one person who had perfectly joined an offensive Supreme Dao with a defensive one, that was just two Daos. Moreover, that man’s path wasn’t really a good fit for the path their masters had chosen.

Ji Ning’s Dao of the Sword, however, was a path which literally included everything. It included techniques meant for slaughter, such as the techniques of the azure-armored man’s master. It included ephemeral and inscrutable techniques, such as those of the white-robed man’s master. And it even included straightforward attacks of overwhelming power, such as the ones used by the muscular man’s master, the greatsword-wielding Hegemon. Ning’s Dao included everything and joined it all together perfectly! He was able to study any of their Daos!

“All I said was, don’t be overly infatuated with him.” The muscular man said coldly, “In addition, I’m not the one who will decide whether or not he’ll be allowed to become my master’s personal disciple. In the end, it will be up to the greatsword as to whether or not it accepts him as its master.”

The azure-armored man and the white-robed man were both stunned. The greatsword... it held truly incalculable amounts of might within it. It was a Universe treasure! Even Eternal Emperors dreamed of acquiring such treasures, but alas, Universe treasures chose their wielders, not the

other way around. If the treasure refused to acknowledge you, there was no way for you to bind it by force whatsoever.

“The only decision I can make is whether or not he qualifies to become my master’s honorary disciple,” the muscular man said. “The decision of who qualifies to become a personal disciple is up to the greatsword.”

“What? You are planning to let him become an honorary disciple?” The azure-armored man and the white-robed man both ground their teeth in frustration.

“Big brother, weren’t you saying how unworthy he...” The azure-armored man couldn’t help but start muttering under his breath.

“Whether or not he can become an honorary disciple will depend on if he can survive my sword or not.” As soon as the muscular man spoke these words... BOOM! He manifested a total of six arms, all six of which assumed a tightened grip over that single deep blue greatsword! But of course, this greatsword wasn’t actually a Universe treasure, just a Dao weapon facsimile.

Swish!

The muscular man transformed into a streak of sword-light that tore through the skies, moving at an incredible pace of nearly five times the speed of light. It must be understood that normally speaking, only Daolords of the Fourth Step were able to attain such incredible speeds. But of course, different people with different Daos would have different areas of specialty. Ning’s Blood Drop sword-art also allowed him to move at incredible speeds by using himself as a sword while using the Blood Drop sword-intent. This was the so-called Blood Drop evasion skill.

The Blood Drop evasion skill was Ning’s fastest evasion skill. The Shadowless evasion skill was more unpredictable, but it was slightly slower. Ever since Ning had perfectly joined together his five Supreme Daos, his Blood Drop evasion skill had undergone a fundamental transformation, making it even faster and more explosive. In the past, he was roughly able to move at three times the speed of light. Now, he would be able to force his speed to a new limit of four times the speed of light.

“The five sword-intents of my Dao of the Sword have been joined together in a perfect manner, but my evasion skill is still inferior to his?” Ning had been utterly dominating those three volcano titans, but when he saw the muscular man fly towards him from afar he no longer dared to act complacently. He immediately used rope-type magic treasures to separately tie up all three volcano titans, ensuring that they wouldn’t be able to disturb him.

“Receive a blow from my sword!” The muscular man’s voice thundered through the skies, as did his distant sword-light. It transformed into a straight line that chopped downwards towards Ning with furious power. The entire world seemed to turn dark, leaving behind only that single terrifying sword-strike as it chopped downwards. Ning was actually completely unable to dodge this attack. His only choice was to defend against it.

Whoosh.

A black hole of sword-light spun out like a lotus flower in the darkness. It swiveled outwards and unleashed layers of power. For an instant, its swiveling movements became as explosively powerful as the Heavenbreaker stance; in the next instant, it would become as soft and ephemeral as the Shadowless stance.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! The deep blue greatsword chopped straight down upon the black hole of sword-light, and the layers of swiveling ‘petals’ sought to transform into other sword-arts while furiously ablating the power of the oncoming attack.

“What a formidable defensive technique.” The muscular man could sense that the offensive power of his deep blue greatsword was being slowly ablated, ground away, and deflected. It was as though it had been trapped within the cycle of Samsara, never to escape again.

“Break! Break! Break!” The muscular man remained quite calm. He held absolute faith in his master’s Dao of the Sword.

No matter how tough you are, I’ll break through with overwhelming power!

This was a Dao of overwhelming force!

BOOM!

Ning was knocked flying backwards. Even when he landed, he had to stumble five steps back before recovering his footing. He stared rather cautiously at the distant, muscular man.

.....

“He blocked it! Ahaha! Just like that, he blocked our big brother’s attack in a head-on collision. Absolutely incredible! That other poor bastard... he might’ve had a perfect fusion of his two Supreme Daos, but our big brother’s sword smashed him straight into the ground.” The distant azure-armored man couldn’t help but sigh in amazement when he saw this.

The white-robed man said, “Darknorth has mastered five Supreme Daos, and he’s joined them together in a Samsara-like cycle. His sword-arts have absolutely no flaws at all, and he’s reached an incredibly high level in all five of his Supreme Daos. In terms of tenacity and toughness, Darknorth’s Sword Dao is definitely the most tenacious and toughest Sword Dao there is.”

“There are other geniuses whose Sword Daos involve the perfect fusions of Supreme Daos, but they all have flaws. Darknorth, however, is skilled in every area. If he was to battle against one of them, he would be able to attack their weaknesses.” The azure-armored man sighed in approval. “Incredibly, absolutely incredible. He actually came up with five Supreme Sword Daos! If in the future he can become a Verge-level Daolord, he’ll definitely stand a good chance of becoming the most powerful Daolord there is.”

There was actually a ranking of monstrously powerful Daolords. In the Endless Territories, Palace Lord Dawnstar of the Twelve Palaces was one such Daolord. The major powers of the Brightshore Kingdom all believed that if Bertulu became a Verge-level Daolord, he would probably be comparable to Lord Dawnstar in power. Lord Dawnstar had once slain an Eternal Emperor with just three strikes of his saber... but despite that, he was only ranked as the second most powerful Daolord of the Endless

Territories.

All of the most monstrously powerful Daolords had fused Supreme Daos together... but despite that, there were still differences in power amongst them!

“Mm.” The white-robed man let out an approving sigh. “Very true. Unfortunately, we won’t live to see that day.”

The azure-armored man suddenly fell silent as well.

Strictly speaking, they weren’t really living creatures. They also had to stay here perpetually for the sake of choosing suitable disciples for their masters. Although they were very willing to do this, they couldn’t help but feel at least a little bit of yearning towards the vast world outside.

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The muscular man’s six hands were clenched around the hilt of that single greatsword. When he attacked, his savagery filled the skies. When he defended, he was as unshakable as a mountain.

Facing him in battle was like facing an enormous boulder that was crashing towards you. As it rolled down towards you, it would only increase in power. If you wanted to survive, you’d have to disrupt and shatter the terrifying momentum of his attacks! Fortunately, Ning had many varied techniques, and his ghostly, inscrutable Shadowless stance was able to repeatedly tie down the muscular man’s movements.

“Enough.” The muscular man suddenly came to a halt. Startled, Ning did the same thing.

This lengthy battle had been quite beneficial for him. The terrifying amount of pressure the muscular man had placed upon Ning had helped him learn how to use his sword-arts in a more effective and natural manner. The muscular man eclipsed Ning in both speed and strength. Although Ning’s Dao of the Sword had many different techniques hidden within it, he was only just barely able to fight the man to a standstill.

“When my master was at the World level, he was probably slightly weaker than you are right now.” The muscular man looked at Ning, then

nodded slightly. "You are qualified to become my master's honorary disciple."

"SHUT YOUR MOUTH!"

"BIG BROTHER!"

Two furious howls rent the air.

The explosive howl of 'shut your mouth' had come from the azure-armored figure, while the one who had called out 'big brother' had come from the graceful, refined-looking white-robed man. The two immediately transformed into streaks of light that flew towards Ning. They had been keeping a close watch on this fight and had kept themselves carefully attuned to every little ripple. As soon as they heard their big brother speak to Ning, they became instantly enraged.

"Big brother, you go too far!" The white-robed man was a bit faster and as such was the first to arrive. After descending, he said angrily, "Didn't you say you weren't interested in Darknorth?"

"Darknorth." When the azure-armored figure landed, he stared intently at Ning. "Don't go be someone else's 'honorary' disciple. What's the point of being an 'honorary' disciple? The nine swords which my master left behind are all incredibly powerful. When they join together, they are all but invincible. Aside from the nine swords, I also have many other treasures which my master left behind for his personal disciple. As I see it, you are perfectly suited for becoming my master's personal disciple."

"Oh yeah? In terms of treasures, my master has even more treasures than yours!" The white-robed man said, "Darknorth, why don't you become my master's personal disciple instead? Our respective masters loved each other as brothers. The reason my master was ranked as the second brother was because he was second only to the Hegemon in power."

"YOU...!" The azure-armored figure was infuriated. Who would've thought that at a critical moment like this, when they were supposed to be working together against their elder brother, the white-robed man would've suddenly 'backstabbed' him?

“Don’t blame me. I’ve waited far, far too long to help my master find a suitable disciple,” the white-robed man said in an innocent, ‘helpless’ manner.

“Shut your faces!” The muscular man had an icy look on his face as he finally snapped out at them, unable to keep silent any longer. He then turned to look at Ning. “It’ll be Darknorth’s decision as to who he chooses.”

To become the Hegemon’s honorary disciple, or to become the personal disciple of one of the other two Eternal Emperors of the Sword? Who should he choose?

Chapter 36: The Hegemon's Treasures

Ji Ning couldn't help but feel his chest tighten as the three stared at him.

When both the white-robed man and the azure-armored man had attempted to stop him from progressing any further, Ning had already decided that he would need to be extremely careful in the thirty-sixth level of the Abyss of Fiends. Even those more powerful than him had perished here, after all. However, Ning was very confident in his defensive skills, and it wasn't like him to back down without a fight. He was willing to use this main clone of his to take on the risk of challenging the final level.

If he won, he would gain a tremendous fortune. And in the end... things had been much simpler than he had anticipated. Not only had he mastered his Heavenbreaker stance, he had almost automatically joined together the five sword-intents into a Samsara sword-intent!

In truth, it all made perfect sense. Ning had reached the bottleneck in all five stances of [Brightmoon] long ago. He had first broke through in the Yin-Yang stance back in the Sword Palace of the Brightshore Kingdom, then had broken through in the other four stances with increasing fluidity! The more he trained, the faster the breakthroughs came until finally, they all came together in a perfect whole – the Yin-Yang stance, the Blood Drop stance, the Shadowless stance, the Soleheart stance, and the Heavenbreaker stance!

“Senior.” Ning looked at the muscular man. “I wonder if this junior qualifies to become the Hegemon's personal disciple?”

If he was going to choose, he would choose the best!

“Personal disciple?” The muscular man was startled, then let out a rare chuckle. “Quite ambitious, aren't we? However, if you wish to become the Hegemon's personal disciple you have to be acknowledged by his Universe treasure!”

“Has it refused to acknowledge me?” Ning asked.

“It hasn't said anything yet. Mm... how about this? I'll help you ask.” The

muscular man suddenly shut his eyes.

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Back in the outside world of the inner reaches. The 540,000 meter tall corpse of the Hegemon had been silently standing there for countless years without moving. His two hands remained perpetually clenched around the hilt of that deep blue greatsword. Suddenly, a flicker of light appeared on the surface of the greatsword as the sword let out a keening sound.

Swoosh. A figure suddenly appeared in front of the three corpses of the grandmasters of the Dao of the Sword.

“What’s going on? I’m sure I wasn’t just imagining things. I’m sure I felt a ripple just now.” A white-robed, silver-eyed man stared at the three corpses with a solemn look on his face. “Did something strange just happen?”

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The thirty-sixth level of the Abyss of Fiends.

The three volcano titans had been released by Ning long ago and had returned to their respective positions, transforming into a trio of towering volcanos once more. Ji Ning, the white-robed man, and the azure-armored man stood there upon the devastated earth, staring at the muscular man. All three of them were rather nervous. If the Universe treasure was willing to accept Ning as its master, then there was no question what Ning’s choice would be.

“I’ve asked it.” The muscular man opened his eyes.

“And? How’d it go?” Ning asked. However, he had a bad feeling about what the answer would be. If the Universe treasure had truly accepted him as its master, there would probably be some certain, special signs that would appear.

The muscular man sighed. “Your understanding of the Dao of the Sword truly is perfect, and it does indeed include the path of cultivation which the Hegemon had walked! You have the most perfect Dao of the Sword

that I have ever encountered. But... that sword told me that it doesn't like you."

"Doesn't... like me?" Ning was flabbergasted.

"Right. It just doesn't like you," the muscular man said. "It followed our master for countless years, and it likes people like Master himself; as vast and bold as the seas, and as deep and steady as the mountains. It doesn't like your type."

Ning was speechless.

So this was the reason the sword had no interest in him. Much like how a man might fall for a woman or vice versa, the Universe sword was only willing to accompany someone who it took a fancy towards! Clearly, the Hegemon had left a tremendous impact on it, making it strongly prefer cultivators who had the same type of personality as the Hegemon had.

"It seems that there are no ties of destiny between myself and that sword." Ning smiled and shook his head. If it didn't like him, there was nothing he could do. Although he was rather disappointed, he wasn't crushed by the refusal! It was extremely difficult to convince a Universe treasure to submit to you, after all. Even Eternal Emperors dreamed of acquiring Universe treasures. Ning had mentally prepared himself to be rejected by it.

Still... despite his mental preparations, deep within his heart he couldn't help but feel a sense of strong disappointment. "You don't like my type, eh? Don't like my type? I don't like you either!"

Still, Ning himself knew that these were nothing more than words of self-consolation. This was the closest he had ever gotten to acquiring an Universe treasure, after all.

"Don't be too disappointed, Darknorth," the white-robed man consoled.

"It's just a Universe treasure. Our big brother is very exacting, but that Universe treasure is even more exacting. It also has a weird temper," the azure-armored man said hurriedly. "I really think you should be my master's personal disciple instead."

“Darknorth, have you decided yet?” The muscular man asked.

Ning pondered for a moment. It seemed as though he would have to choose between being the Hegemon’s honorary disciple or a personal disciple of one of the two retainer Eternal Emperors.

“Seniors, can you explain to me as to which treasures I’ll be able to acquire if I become the Hegemon’s honorary disciple or a personal disciple of your respective masters? What techniques I’ll gain? If you can tell me a bit more, I’ll be better equipped to make the right decision,” Ning said.

“Makes sense.”

“Alright, let me explain.”

“Take a look first.”

All three waved their hands. Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! The formerly empty and devastated ground before them became be filled with images of magic treasures, all of which looked to be quite extraordinarily.

“I’ll go first.” The azure-armored figure pointed at the levitating images of the nine blood-colored swords. “First of all, you’ll gain these nine precious swords. They are incomparably mighty, and it is almost impossible to buy them under normal circumstances. You’ll also gain this suit of armor, this gourd, and this banner. And of course, you’ll also gain Master’s sword-arts legacy as well as his secret arts, divine abilities, etc.”

The majority of an Eternal Emperor’s treasure trove lay before Ning. Ning couldn’t help but be filled with many thoughts as he stared at them.

“My turn.” The white-robed man began to narrate the treasures he had to offer as he pointed at the illusions of the violet-hilted, gold-hilted, and white-hilted swords, as well as the many other treasures he had.

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The muscular man stood silently there in the rubble. Only after his second brother and third brother finished speaking did he say calmly, “I have two sets of treasures here for the two honorary disciples which Master is willing to accept. You can choose one of your liking.”

“The first set includes fifty million cubes of chaos nectar! It also includes two Dao-seals which the Hegemon personally forged! It also has the sword which the Hegemon used prior to him acquiring his Universe treasure. This sword alone is worth just as much as the armaments which my second brother and my third brother have offered you. In addition, you’ll also gain access to the complete sword-arts legacy which Master left behind, as well as his divine abilities and secret arts.

“The second set also includes fifty million cubes of chaos nectar, two Dao-seals which the Hegemon personally forged, and the suit of armor which the Hegemon wore when he was alive. This suit of armor has many marvelous properties, and it too is worth just as much as the armaments of his two retainers. In addition, you’ll also gain access to the complete sword-arts legacy which Master left behind, as well as his divine abilities and secret arts.”

After finishing his explanation, the muscular man fell silent.

The white-robed man and the azure-armored man both looked at Ning expectantly.

As for Ning, he carefully examined each of the levitating illusions. The white-robed man and the azure-armored man had treated him very well, but this involved a tremendous fortune for him. He absolutely could not treat this decision lightly.

The other two Eternal Emperors had left virtually all of their treasures to their personal disciples. The treasures were staggering in both number and value.

In terms of valuable treasures, the two Eternal Emperors had more. But! What the Hegemon had left behind would be more of use to him! It was highly likely that no one in all the Endless Territories was a match for the deceased Hegemon with regards to the Dao of the Sword. His sword-arts legacy was something which Ning would never have a chance to learn again. The Hegemon had successfully completed his Daomerge... his sword-arts would definitely be of enormous assistance to Ning as a valuable reference.

“The best treasures are the ones which suit you the best. In addition... I’d have to find a way to sell off the treasures of the other two Eternal Emperors. The Dao-seals and chaos nectar which the Hegemon left behind are of more immediate use to me.” Ning nodded.

“Forgive me, seniors,” Ning said apologetically.

The white-robed man and the azure-armored man both let out sighs, looking rather forlorn. The white-robed man shook his head and smiled. “The two of us suspected that this would be your answer. The complete sword-arts legacy of a Hegemon... both of us know exactly how alluring such a thing is to a cultivator of the Dao of the Sword.”

The complete sword-arts legacy of a Hegemon of the Dao of the Sword was absolutely priceless.

You might be able to find a few grandmasters of the Dao of the Sword who were on the general level of Emperor Mirrorsnow, but where would you even begin to start a search for a Hegemon-level figure? Even after Ning became a Verge-level Daolord, no sum of money would be enough for him to locate such a complete sword-arts legacy.

“Congratulations, big brother.”

“Big brother, you’ve finally found an honorary disciple for your master.” The other two both expressed congratulations. They couldn’t help but secretly sigh to themselves. The two of them and their big brother had waited for far too long for a successor. The only difference was that their big brother was even more exacting than they were.

It had been countless years, but their big brother had finally chosen an honorary disciple for the Hegemon! The Hegemon would only accept a total of two honorary disciples, which meant that his honorary disciples would be treated many times better than the personal disciples of Emperor Mirrorsnow were.

The sword which the Hegemon had once wielded, the suit of armor he had once worn... both were truly priceless.

“Darknorth.” The muscular man’s lips parted as he finally revealed a

rare smile. "Follow me." He transformed into a streak of light and flew towards the distant shrine.

Chapter 37: The Paragon of Pills

Swoosh! Swoosh!

The muscular man and Ji Ning advanced together into the shrine.

“Eh?” Inside the shrine, Ning saw lakes of flowing lava, next to which were strange trees that seemed to be made out of fine jade. Ning couldn’t recognize where these trees came from.

Next to the lava lakes there was an ordinary-looking stone house, and there was a figure seated in the lotus position within the house. The figure sat there without moving, and from the looks of it had been there for countless chaos cycles already.

“Master.” The muscular man walked over, then said respectfully, “I’ve chosen an honorary disciple for you.”

Ning instantly realized that the figure seated in the lotus position within the stone house was most likely a fragment of the Hegemon’s will and memories which the Hegemon had left behind prior to passing.

The seated figure suddenly opened his eyes, and his eyes shone in the darkness of the stone house like a pair of two vast transversal conduits. Ning was instantly lost within his gaze.

“My disciple... if in the future you succeed in the Daomerge and gain eternity, it is my wish that you repay the grace I shall show you today you unto the Paragon of Pills.” A voice filled with complex emotions and frustration rang out from within the stone room.

Whoosh.

A streak of light instantly shot out of the seated figure and flew straight towards Ning. As soon as it touched Ning, it was instantly drawn straight into his body. As for the seated figure, it now seemed a bit dimmer and paler. Moments later, the door to the stone house rumbled shut.

Ning stood there, a series of images playing within his mind.

These images were of a muscular man who was training in sword-arts in

his youth. It also included images of him becoming an Elder God, then a World God, then a Daolord, and finally an Eternal Emperor, as well as the many sword-arts involved...

The sword-arts started off weak, became stronger, and then completely surpassed Ning's imagination. This Hegemon had reached his level after perfectly joining together two Supreme Daos. Although this wasn't quite as impressive as what Ning had done, it wasn't that far off either.

He became a dazzling figure that gained true eternity, and was then given the respectful title of 'Hegemon'! Not even the most monstrously powerful of Daolords would dare to challenge an Eternal Emperor of such power. This was because he himself was already one of the most monstrously powerful of Daolords in his era. Now that he was an Eternal Emperor, he only became even more powerful than before.

"What a powerful sword." Ning's eyes were unfocused and intoxicated, and his thoughts were completely filled with images of inconceivably powerful sword-arts. Some possessed such incredible magic power that they seemed to surpass the limitations of the Dao itself.

A single strike of that sword could pass through the boundaries of spacetime and slay a foe who was a hundred territories away.

A single strike of that sword could cause spacetime itself to flow backwards, allowing the wielder to go back in time. Alas, it wasn't able to allow individuals who had perished in the past to be brought back to life.

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The Prime Reaches of the Genesis Lands of the Archaeus region of the alternate universe. This was an incredibly mysterious place, and the thirty-five Eternal Emperors who had perished here weren't even the most important or most mysterious aspects to it.

The living Eternal Emperors didn't care too much about the deceased ones. At most, they'd display a bit of interest in the Universe treasures. What the living Eternal Emperors truly cared about were certain mysteries that were hidden within the prime essences of the universe! They were what had allowed the master of the Church of Annihilation to rise to

power, becoming the number one expert of this entire universe and unifying it under his banner.

Whoosh.

A black gauzy figure flew through the skies, moving past the primessence chains that led from the outer reaches, then flying directly into the world of the inner reaches.

“What?!”

“How is that even possible?!”

“Isn’t the only way into the inner reaches through traversing the primessence chains on foot?”

There were eighteen World-level cultivators and three Daolords standing at the outer reaches end of the primessence chains. One of those World-level cultivators was Waterlord Firesurge. Firesurge had also spent quite a bit of time wandering the outer reaches, and had also benefited greatly as a result of it. He felt that he had improved significantly, and so he wanted to once more test himself against the primessence chains. Alas, although this time he made it to the nine hundred kilometer mark, he still ended up failing.

“How can someone just fly across?” Waterlord Firesurge stared in disbelief at the gauze-clad figure that had just flown past them.

When the black, gauzy figure flew past them, it was as though spacetime itself had no hold over her whatsoever. She seemed to be drifting slowly, but in reality she moved so quickly that she almost instantly disappeared from the field of vision of the Daolords and the World-level cultivators.

“World-level cultivators and Daolords must tread the primessence chains. If not, they will be drawn into the abyss below and devoured. Only Eternal Emperors would dare to ignore the primessence chains and fly straight into the world of the inner reaches.”

“Right. That had to have been an Eternal Emperor.”

“Who was that Eternal Emperor?”

The Daolords and World-level cultivators quickly were able to guess at the status of that person. Eternal Emperors were incredibly rare and few in number. It must be understood that only two of them resided within the Genesis Lands, with one being Emperor Maniseal and the other being Emperor Northtree. That lithe figure that had flown past clearly belonged to neither of them.

“Which Eternal Emperor is it, then?”

“I’ve seen many people and many things, but I truly have no idea who that was. Could it be that a Daolord has recently completed his Daomerge and become a new Eternal Emperor? But once that happens, the news would quickly spread to the entirety of the Church of Annihilation.” The Daolords and World-level cultivators continued to make their guesses, puzzled at what had just happened, but they all memorized the appearance of that black figure. They wanted to make sure that they remembered this was a person for them to never, ever offend.

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The inner reaches. The thirty-five ancient corpses still lay scattered around this world.

The white-robed, silver-eyed man continued to stand there, silently inspecting the corpses of the three grandmasters of the sword. “I’m sure I sensed a special ripple just now... could it be that some of the legendary secrets of the prime essences are hidden here?”

The white-robed man carefully searched through every inch of the region. Anything involving the secrets of the prime essences was enough to drive any major power wild with lust. The Church of Annihilation was the perfect example of what it could bring. Who wouldn’t go crazy for something like that?

Whoosh.

A gentle wind blew, and a figure appeared.

“What?!” The white-robed man was so badly shocked that even his face turned pale. “How could someone have appeared right next to me without

me sensing anything at all?”

He was a Daolord of the Fourth Step, and an extremely famous one. He had once battled an Eternal Emperor for an extremely long period of time before fleeing. He was definitely strong enough to cause many other Daolords to sigh in amazement.

He slowly turned his head to stare at the nearby figure. Roughly thirty meters away stood a slender figure who was dressed in black gauzy clothes. She emanated an aura of endless coldness and purity, and she stood there as though she herself was the genesis source of this world. Everything around her seemed to naturally submit to her will! Here, she reigned supreme.

“Primordial Starqueen... the Paragon of Pills?” The white-robed man was so horrified that his heart shuddered with fear. He hurriedly fell to his knees with respect. “This junior greets you, Starqueen.”

The highest ranking member in the Church of Annihilation was its leader and master, the one who had unified this entire universe. Second to him were the sixteen Starkings.

The sixteen Starkings were all unfathomably profound individuals, but the most powerful and mysterious members amongst their ranks were the ones known as the three Primordial Starkings! The reason why they were different from the other thirteen and were titled as ‘primordial’ was because they had been alive since the very birth of this universe.

The White Emperor was the teacher of the leader of the Church of Annihilation, and he was one of the three Primordial Starkings. As for the Paragon of Pills, she was also one of the three. She was an extremely mysterious figure who moved in mysterious ways and rarely revealed herself. It was very difficult for even Eternal Emperors to have a chance to meet with her. However, most of the high-status members of this universe all knew what she looked like.

She always dressed in black gauze and had a look of perpetual iciness about her. As for her features, they were forever be masked by a formless barrier of fog. There was no way to see her true features at all.

“What just happened here...” The black-garbed figure stared at the distant corpse of the greatsword-wielding man, complex emotions in her eyes. “Why did I suddenly feel as though something momentous happened?”

“Big brother... don’t grow too impatient. Big brother, second brother, third brother... I’ll reverse the flows of spacetime and bring all of you back to life...” The black-garbed figure murmured softly to herself. She had said these words far, far too many times. Her gaze was completely focused upon the muscular, greatsword-wielding man.

Suddenly, the look on her face changed. The aura around her began to ripple and rumble as well.

It must be understood that this place was the Prime Reaches of the Genesis Lands. This was no ordinary place! Ji Ning and the various Daolords weren’t even able to fly about here, a testament to how powerful the various restrictive forces here were. And yet... just the slightest hint of startlement from the black-garbed figure was enough to cause the aura of the surrounding area to shake and rumble. All Daos were shaking, as though wishing to retreat from her.

Where I stand, all other Daos must bend the knee!

The white-robed man’s heart shook with cold fear as he saw this. She lived up to her reputation as one of the three Primordial Starkings! In fact, according to the legends the only reason why the leader of the Church of Annihilation was able to rise to power was because the three Primordial Starkings had no interest in battle or power. The legends said that in reality, the three Primordial Starkings were just as powerful as their ‘leader’.

Of course, those were just legends! The three Primordial Starkings, however, had indeed existed since the birth of this universe. This was why everyone believed that they knew the secrets held within it.

“What’s going on? Everything was fine earlier. Nothing like this was happening.” The white-robed man was puzzled.

As for the black-garbed figure, the Paragon of Pills, she stared at the

treasures placed in front of the muscular man. Others, such as Daolords, might not be able to see anything, but her gaze easily pierced through the restrictive spells and allowed her to realize that a treasure was now missing from the pile.

“A treasure has disappeared? Who took it?” The Paragon turned to scan her surroundings, causing everything within the inner reaches to fall under her gaze.

“Tell me, what happened here?” The Paragon of Pills stared intently at the white-robed man.

“I...” The white-robed man truly had no idea as to what he should say.

Whoosh.

A handsome, white-robed youth who had a longsword on his back suddenly appeared out of nowhere.

Chapter 38: The Trileaf Realm

Ji Ning had left the Abyss of Fiends and returned to the inner reaches in a wonderful mood. But then...

“Eh?” Ning stared at the two figures in front of him. Although the white-robed, silver-eyed man had an extraordinary demeanor, Ning wasn’t too surprised by his presence; the inner reaches of the Genesis Lands held quite a few Daolords of renown and power. But when he saw that slender, black-garbed figure... Ning couldn’t help but feel a sense of shock in his heart.

He wasn’t too far away from her, but Ning felt like a blind man groping for a flower within the mists. He couldn’t see what she looked like; all he could sense was an aura of incredible coldness radiating from her, so cold that it burrowed deep into his soul and caused him to quiver.

“Who is this person?” Ning was shocked. “Not even Lord Woodflower of our Sword Palace is a match for her.”

The black-garbed figure was staring at Ning as well, weighing him with a judging gaze. Her eyes seemed to see right through him and all of his secrets! Ning could sense that she was staring at him. It was a strange feeling; she was staring at him, but he couldn’t see her at all.

“So it was you.” The black-garbed figure suddenly spoke out, and her voice was just as cold and crisp as he had imagined it to be. Suddenly, she waved her sleeve.

Whoosh. Ning disappeared into thin air.

According to the rules of the Church of Annihilation, all violence was forbidden within the Genesis Lands. To forcibly abduct or teleport someone away was similarly forbidden. The nearby Daolord just stared blankly, not daring to make a sound. “Even if the leader of the Church of Annihilation found out about this, he probably wouldn’t say anything.”

The Paragon of Pills, one of the three Primordial Starkings... even if she chose to massacre everyone in the Genesis Lands, what of it?

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After making Ning disappear, the Paragon of Pills said calmly, "You may leave now."

"Yes." The silver-eyed man immediately assented respectfully, then fled at high speeds.

The Paragon of Pills raised her head, staring at the corpse of the muscular, greatsword-wielding man with an almost dazed look in her eyes. She seemed to forget about time itself as she just stared at him silently.

He had died. Died a long, long time ago. But his corpse looked just like it did when he was alive.

"Paragon of Pills." Suddenly, a voice rang out.

"Mm?" The black-garbed Paragon turned gracefully, sweeping the area behind her with her dazzling, bewitchingly beautiful eyes. Off in the distance stood a Daoist dressed in deep blue robes and a high crown. He was walking straight towards her.

"Maniseal." The Paragon's voice remained as cool as ever. "I hear you are quite talented. You've even managed to devise something known as a 'Lifeblood Dao-seal'?"

Emperor Maniseal was startled. Indeed, his greatest accomplishment in the Dao of Seals was the Lifeblood Dao-seal, but very few people knew of this. In the Church of Annihilation, the only Eternal Emperors who knew of this should've been the church's leader and the White Emperor. How was it that another one of the three Primordial Starkings, the Paragon of Pills, had found out as well?

"It seems you keep a close watch on things, Paragon." Emperor Maniseal nodded. "Then I imagine you also know why I have come here?"

"You wish to reverse the flows of spacetime to resurrect that disciple of yours?" The Paragon said.

"In terms of mastery over reversing spacetime, you are probably more skilled than anyone else in our universe," Emperor Maniseal said. "The

leader of the Church and the White Emperor have made excessive demands of me. I have no other options, which is why I have come to speak to you and ask if you can consider reviving my disciple.”

“I cannot save your disciple, but the leader of the Church can,” the Paragon said coolly.

“Cannot save him?” Emperor Maniseal was stunned.

“To reverse the flows of spacetime and to bring back to life a being whose truesoul was extinguished... this is a violation of one of the grand Daos that sustains the entire universe,” the Paragon said slowly. “The universe continues to advance towards the future, and so to reverse the flows of spacetime is to go against the will and destiny of the universe.”

“The lord of the Church of Annihilation can borrow some of the power of the prime essences of our universe and so would be able to resist the backlash from the universe. I, however, cannot,” the Paragon said.

A look of disappointment appeared on Emperor Maniseal’s face.

“Didn’t you say long ago that it was much easier to reverse spacetime and bring back to life those who were below the Eternal Emperor level?” Emperor Maniseal felt both impatient and heartbroken.

The Paragon of Pills gave him a cold glance. Emperor Maniseal’s heart shook.

Long, long ago, the Paragon of Pills had already risen to stand at the very apex of this universe. Back then, the leader of the Church of Annihilation had yet to rise to power, and the mightiest figures in the universe were the three Primordial Starkings.

Back then, the Paragon of Pills had done everything she could, paid every price she could pay, to try and reverse the flows of spacetime so as to bring back her big brother. Alas... in the end, she had failed. She had suffered such an incredible backlash from the universe that she herself had nearly perished as well.

Gripped by despair, she had said to the other two Primordial Starkings, “It would be much simpler if I was trying to reverse the flows of spacetime

for someone below the Eternal Emperor level. But to revive someone who has gained eternity... it is far, far too hard..."

After that, the Paragon of Pills had left by herself and disappeared for a long period of time. Later on, when the lord of the Church of Annihilation had risen to power and unified the universe, he had invited the sixteen Starkings to join his organization. It was only then that the Paragon of Pills had appeared once more.

"Do not try to reverse the flows of spacetime to revive your disciple. Aside from the lord of the Church of Annihilation, no one can accomplish this task." The Paragon's voice was chilly. "I... I cannot bring anyone back at all."

Emperor Fubo knew that he could no longer ask any more questions. This was the only female member of the three Primordial Starkings, and she was unfathomably strong. All three of the Primordial Starkings were on very good terms with each other. When the Paragon of Pills had sought to revive her brothers, the other two had sacrificed quite a bit in their attempts to help her succeed.

As a matter of face, reversing spacetime to revive someone was something of a taboo topic for the Paragon of Pills. The only reason she had been willing to tell Emperor Maniseal so much was because pitied him as someone who shared the same desires as her, due to his wish to bring his disciple back to life.

"Just now, I sensed that after you came here you abducted a young fellow," Emperor Maniseal said with a smile. "Is that young fellow your big brother's successor?"

"Maniseal." The Paragon gave Emperor Maniseal a hard glance. "I'm warning you right now that you are not to get involved in the affairs of juniors."

"I know that, of course! If there's anything you need, Paragon, you can just let me know. I'll do everything I can to assist." Emperor Maniseal smiled as he produced a strange jade seal that was a mixture of black and white colors. "Consider this Dao-seal as my gift to that young fellow."

The Paragon glanced at it, the corners of her lips curving upwards slightly. She waved her hand, accepting the talisman.

“No need to send me off.” The Paragon of Pills turned and gracefully departed.

Emperor Maniseal watched as the Paragon disappeared off into the distance, then revealed a hint of a smile. “The Hegemon of the Dao of the Sword... it has been countless years since he passed away. This should be his very first successor.”

When the Hegemon had perished, he had set down certain restrictive spells around himself. No one from the outside would be able to see any changes, but those who were able to see through the restrictive spells would be able to see just how many treasures lay hidden behind them.

Long, long ago, the Paragon of Pills had first risen to fame due to her mastery over alchemy. This was why she was respectfully titled the Paragon of Pills. In this universe, she was publicly acclaimed as the number one alchemist, and no one had ever surpassed her in this regard. She was naturally far superior to her big brother in terms of restrictive spells, and so she was able to see through it with ease.

As for Emperor Maniseal, he was the undisputed number one master of the Dao of Seals. As a result, in mastery over restrictive spells at least, he was somewhat superior to the deceased Hegemon.

Both of them were able to see through the restrictive spells and note the number of remaining treasures. However, neither of them dared to take the treasures by force. If they did, they would suffer an attack from the power of the entire Prime Reaches... and the Prime Reaches was where the prime essences of the entire universe lay. This would represent a strike from the entire universe, a strike of incalculable power.

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Ning was now within an estate-world. This world was merely a few hundred kilometers in size, and there was no way out of it.

“Why was I captured and brought to this place? That woman... did she

act with malice in mind, or was she motivated by good intentions?” This had been completely unexpected. He hadn’t even had the chance to celebrate the fact that he had become the Hegemon’s honorary disciple and gained his treasures. Instead, he had almost instantly been abducted by this new power.

Someone actually dared to attack him within the inner reaches? That had to mean she was at least at the Eternal Emperor level.

“What will be, will be. Not like there’s any way for me to avoid it.” Ning understood that given how this major power had been able to abduct him without him being able to put up any resistance at all... there was no way he could fight back against her.

Whoosh.

Ning could sense himself being surrounded by an enormous surge of power. Moments later, the world around him changed.

“Where am I?” Ning stared up ahead. He was in an area of endless darkness. The only thing within this region was a strange, five-colored space bridge. Aside from this five-colored space bridge, there was nothing but darkness. As for Ning himself, he was standing atop the bridge. Next to him was that slender, black-garbed figure.

“We’ve already left the Archaeus region. Soon, we’ll reach the Trileaf Realm.” The black-garbed figure spoke out, and the five-colored space bridge beneath their feet was advancing through the darkness at incredible speeds.

They were travelling countless trillions of kilometers with every moment. They were moving far faster than Prince Greatjoy’s teleporting abilities could handle.

“Left the Archaeus region?” Ning was flabbergasted. Weren’t they in the Genesis Lands just now? He spent nearly ten thousand freaking years travelling through the Archaeus region and into the Genesis Lands. How the hell did the suddenly leave it in an instant? He felt as though it hadn’t even been enough time to boil a kettle of tea. This level of speed was ridiculous.

“Senior, dare I ask... what exactly is this Trileaf Realm?” Ning asked.

“My place.” The Paragon of Pills gave a calm response.

Chapter 39: Month Loan

The five-colored space bridge continued to stretch off into the distance, easily traversing the boundaries of both space and time. Just a short while later, a world that looked like an Immortal's abode appeared before them, vast and beautiful.

"This place is the Trileaf Realm. Long ago, I chose a location within the Sea of Bitter Darkness and established a world within it. Ever since then, I have been living here." The Paragon of Pills said in a cold voice, "The Trileaf Realm is a fairly well-hidden place. You probably have never heard of it before today. In the future, you may visit whenever you so desire."

Ji Ning relaxed slightly. It seemed as though this mysterious major power was treating him quite well. "Senior, are you planning to let me leave this place?"

"Of course. Do you think you'll be able to succeed in your Daomerge and gain eternity just by sitting here instead of going out adventuring?" The Paragon glanced sideways at Ning. "Don't worry. I've brought you here for certain reasons. Once I'm finished, I'll naturally let you go on your way. In the future, you can enter and exit this place freely! Although it's quite difficult for outsiders to enter my Trileaf Realm, things are different for you. You are the disciple of my old friend, and you can thus be considered one of the juniors in my lineage."

Ji Ning said, "Thank you, senior." Only then was Ning in the mood to spend some time inspecting this Trileaf Realm. From the outside, it looked like an enormous world that was being held up by a trio of blooming leaves. This world was so vast that it was countless times greater than most of the land masses Ning had encountered thus far.

"Do you know why it is named the Trileaf Realm?" The Paragon of Pills suddenly asked.

"Is it because of those three enormous leaves that are holding up the world? Is that why it is named the Trileaf Realm?" Ning guessed.

The Paragon slowly shook her head, but she didn't explain.

Swoosh!

The Paragon led Ning to fly downwards into the beautiful fairyland world below them.

.....

The Archaeus region. The Genesis Lands. The outer reaches.

A streak of fire suddenly flew out of a secret region. Su Youji was dressed in her usual fiery red robes, and her entire body was bathed in flames that were shaped like a bird of some sort.

“I can’t sense Master’s aura any longer. Why can’t I sense his aura? I could sense that he was in the inner reaches just a short while ago.” Su Youji stared towards the inner reaches, a look of restless unease in her eyes. In the moment that the Paragon pulled Ning away, Su Youji had lost her ability to sense Ning’s location.

Ning had given her a message-talisman, and she had given him one of hers. Theoretically speaking, the two would be able to constantly sense where the other was located and could meet up whenever they chose.

“Why have I suddenly lost all contact with him? What should I do. What should I do?” Su Youji felt extremely uneasy. This uneasy feeling had actually caused her to give up adventuring through the secret region she had been in, and give up on her chances to acquire the treasures within that region.

Su Youji transformed into a streak of light, repeatedly teleporting forwards as she moved towards the inner reaches at high speeds.

A short while later.

“Firesurge!” A group of cultivators was clustered together at the outer reaches end of the primessence chains, and Waterlord Firesurge was with them.

“Fellow Daoist Firesurge.” Su Youji immediately landed, then called out to him respectfully.

“Flamefairy?” Seeing her, Firesurge immediately rose to his feet and

asked curiously, "Flamefairy, why have you come here? Judging from the worried look on your face... what exactly has happened?"

"It's my master." Su Youji said worriedly, "I can sense that Master vanished. I feel very uneasy, which is why I immediately came over here. Have you seen my master, fellow Daoist Firesurge?"

Firesurge shook his head. "I haven't seen Darknorth since he entered the inner reaches. Did you just say that you lost contact with him, all of a sudden?"

"Right." Su Youji nodded hurriedly. "But his message-talisman is still with me, and it's completely undamaged."

If Ning had died, then the message-talisman should've sensed it and then shattered apart.

"So the talisman isn't damaged, right?" Firesurge asked.

"It did not." Su Youji nodded.

"The world of the inner reaches is filled with many different dangers," Firesurge said. "This is, after all, the place where this entire universe was birthed. It is highly possible that Darknorth might have found himself trapped in some location which prevents anyone outside of it from contacting him. It is highly likely that your master is still alive. But of course, for it to be able to sever all contact means it is definitely an extraordinary location. It's also possible that your master..."

Su Youji's heart trembled. This was exactly what she was afraid of. Ji Ning had been in the inner reaches for many years now, and she had been able to sense his presence this entire time! The same was true for Heartlord Solewind and his own retainer, Chaos Immortal Swallowback. Now, even Prince Greatjoy had gone into the inner reaches, with his retainer World Goddess Skywolf able to sense his presence.

But now... all of a sudden, she could no longer sense where Ji Ning was! Something must've gone wrong!

"Wait a bit longer. From what I've heard, World-level cultivators generally won't spend too much time in the inner reaches," Firesurge said.

“Let’s just wait a few thousand more years and see if he ends up coming out.”

“Alright.” Su Youji nodded slowly. There was nothing else she could do. “Thank you, fellow Daoist Firesurge.” Su Youji immediately chose a quiet corner and then sat down in the lotus position. Her mind was now restless, and she was in no mood to continue adventuring. Still... she had already made shockingly great gains during her previous adventures in the outer reaches.

“Master, you have to live.” Su Youji’s feelings towards Ning were very complex. Ning was extremely powerful, and he had also saved her on numerous occasions. She couldn’t help but feel a sense of love and admiration for him, but she could also sense that he had someone else in his heart. As a result, Su Youji had always been hesitant and unable to voice her feelings for him.

.....

Deep within the Sea of Bitter Darkness, there lay the Trileaf Realm.

A few ripples appeared in front of an ancient, pitch-black building. From the ripples emerged a pair of figures; the Paragon of Pills and Ji Ning.

“This is my estate.” The Paragon of Pills spoke calmly as she advanced.

Ji Ning followed her from behind. Rather curious, he asked, “Senior, why is it that I don’t see any other cultivators within this estate?” There wasn’t even so much as a gateguard. This truly was quite odd.

“I prefer the peace and quiet. I dislike being disturbed by others,” the Paragon said coolly.

“Oh.” Ning nodded.

If any of the other major powers of the Trileaf Realm saw how their exalted, transcendent leader, the Paragon of Pills, was casually carrying on a conversation with a mere World-level cultivator, they would almost certainly be stupefied by this. The Paragon of Pills was famous for her cold indifference! She generally wouldn’t even pay any attention to most Eternal Emperors.

The reason she chatted a bit with Emperor Maniseal was because he was very powerful as well as a person who was struggling hard to revive his beloved disciple. This was why the Paragon of Pills treated him differently.

Whoosh. Whoosh. Whoosh.

In front of them was an enormous pill cauldron. Next to the pill cauldron there was a vast lake that was a hundred kilometers in size, and above the lake there was a waterfall that thundered downwards towards it.

“Is that...” Ning stared at the lakes in utter astonishment. “Is th-th-th-that all chaos nectar?”

A hundred kilometer lake that was completely composed of chaos nectar? Ning was rather dazed. How much chaos nectar was that?!

“Do you understand alchemy?” The Paragon of Pills looked at Ning.

“I do not.” Ning shook his head.

“If you did, you would understand. Chaos nectar is incredibly important to the creation of pills, and it is chaos nectar which gives our pills their various magical properties. Chaos nectar can give birth to life itself; in fact, it can give birth to all things. It is an indispensable part of alchemy,” the Paragon said. “An exceedingly vast amount of chaos nectar is used up with the creation of every highly valuable pill. That’s why I just went ahead and set up an entire lake of it here. It makes it easier for me to withdraw as much as I need when I engage in my alchemy.”

Ning was secretly speechless. Although the deceased Hegemon had prepared fifty million cubes of chaos nectar for his honorary disciples, that sum couldn’t even come close to the amount of chaos nectar in this hundred kilometer lake.

The Paragon of Pills continued to walk forwards. They quickly arrived at a stone dais before the enormous pill cauldron, whereupon she sat down in the lotus position and turned her gaze towards Ning.

“There’s something I would ask of you,” the Paragon of Pills said.

“Pray tell, senior.” Ning nodded respectfully.

"I know that you have gained a legacy from the Hegemon. The Hegemon's suit of armor should be with you," the Paragon said.

Ning felt a great sense of shock. Even this was known to her?

"Yes." Ning didn't try to play any games with her at all. He immediately nodded.

"That suit of armor..." The Paragon hesitated for a moment, then continued, "Loan it to me for a month."

"Loan?" Ning was secretly speechless. If she wanted to take it from him, there would've been nothing he could do.

Ning willed it, and a streak of light immediately flew out from his body and coalesced within his hands into the form of an ancient, unadorned suit of armor. This suit of armor had an aura that was as deep and profound as that of a fathomless abyss. It was as though an enormous mountain was lying within Ning's palms.

When the Paragon of Pills saw that ancient suit of armor appear within Ning's palms, she couldn't help but tremble.

"Senior." Ning stretched his hand out, causing the ancient suit of armor to fly out towards her.

The Paragon of Pills slowly accepted the armor, placing it across her lap. She gently stroked it with her hands, her fingers shaking uncontrollably. She murmured something softly to herself, but Ning wasn't able to hear what she was saying at all.

"Can you tell me if the Hegemon told you anything when he transferred this legacy to you? Did he mention anyone?" The Paragon of Pills asked softly.

"The Hegemon did not say much to me. He only said a single thing." Ning didn't try to hide it at all. "He said: 'My disciple... if in the future you succeed in the Daomerge and gain eternity, it is my wish that you repay the grace I shall show you today you unto the Paragon of Pills.'"

Ning still had no idea that this black-garbed woman was the Paragon of

Pills.

The Paragon's heart shook.

Two crystalline tears suddenly dripped down from her face. They landed on the suit of armor, then broke apart into many tiny fragments. However, the mist surrounding her made it impossible for Ning to see this at all.

Chapter 40: [Seven Leafpill Chapters]

The Paragon of Pills was silent for a long moment. She then said, "I'm borrowing this suit of armor for half a month, but I will compensate you for it. I can agree to one request of yours, so long as it isn't too excessive. Think it over. Even if you ask for a golem as strong as a Daolord of the Fourth Step, I can make it happen. Once you decide, simply tell me what you desire."

Ji Ning felt a surge of joy in his heart. Loaning out the suit of armor brought with it such a high 'interest'? Senior, why don't you borrow it for nine or ten years instead? But of course, he didn't say that aloud.

"You'll only have a single opportunity to make such a request of me. Choose wisely," the Paragon said.

"Right." Ning nodded, lost in thought. What should he ask for? Treasures? But he already had the Hegemon's armor, fifty million cubes of chaos nectar, and the Hegemon's Dao-seals... asking for more treasure really wouldn't make that much of a difference to him. The only thing which really mattered would be something which would have a significant effect on his future growth.

"Senior." Ning's eyes suddenly lit up as he stared at the enormous nearby cauldron. "Given the enormous cauldron and this enormous custom-made lake of chaos nectar, I imagine you are highly skilled in the art of alchemy, right?"

"Right." The Paragon nodded. "In terms of alchemy... there is no one in this entire universe who is a match for me. Even in the art of creating golems, I would definitely rank in the top three."

Ning was badly startled by this. What a tremendous claim to make! Only someone who felt completely confident in their skills would dare to claim that no one else in the entire universe would be a match for them.

"Senior, if you are skilled in alchemy..." Ning nodded. "Can you transmit some alchemy techniques to me?"

“Alchemy techniques?” The Paragon looked at Ning. “In the world of alchemy, such techniques are generally considered secret and are never taught to outsiders. You wish to study alchemy?”

Ning shook his head, willing his Dao lightning and his Dao water to fly out from his body. “Please take a look at them, seinor. This junior has learned a certain secret art that can allow Dao lightning to join together in a marvelous fashion, almost like the formation of a new pill. When mastered, it will allow me to perfectly merge together nine types of Dao lightning into my ‘Novessence Thunder’! It’ll be so incredibly strong that I will be able to slay even Daolords of the Fourth Step with it. However, actually training in this secret art is incredibly difficult, and my understanding of the art of alchemy is too lacking.”

“To use divine lightning as the ingredients for this secret art... the person who created this secret art can be considered as having gained a basic level of insight into the true art of alchemy.” The Paragon of Pills nodded.

Ning was speechless. Daolord Allgod had only gained a ‘basic level of insight’ into alchemy? And the scary thing was... compared to this woman, who proclaimed herself to be the most talented alchemist in this entire universe, Daolord Allgod probably truly had indeed only gained a ‘basic’ understanding of alchemy.

“I almost never teach my alchemy techniques to others.” The Paragon of Pills hesitated momentarily. She once more gently brushed her fingers against the armor in her lap, then said, “And to date, I’ve only taught it to my three disciples. Today, you shall be the fourth to receive my alchemy techniques. Remember – without my permission, you are not to teach it to outsiders. Anyone who spends even a little bit of time training in this technique will become an expert in alchemy, and will be at least as skilled as the person who created this secret art of yours. If you were to spend a bit of time and effort on my technique, you would be able to easily surpass him.”

Ning was speechless once again. Surpass Daolord Allgod in the Dao of Alchemy?

“Memorize this.” The Paragon of Pills waved her hand. Instantly, a deep-green rune that was shaped almost like a bamboo leaf flew out of her and towards Ning. As soon as it touched Ning, it instantly began to burrow its way into Ning’s memories.

A long time later, the process finally came to an end. Everything was memorized.

A new technique was now present within Ning’s mind. Its name was the [Seven Leafpill Chapters], and when Ning looked at it he felt as though he had been enlightened with perfect wisdom. The purest truths and the greatest of Daos could be described very simply. Just by reading through the technique once, Ning’s insights into the Dao of Alchemy began to skyrocket. Most likely, he was now already comparable to World God Pillsaint in alchemy!

The reason for this was mainly because the [Seven Leafpill Chapters] were simply incredible. But of course, it was also because Ning himself had reached a high level of comprehension in his own Daos.

“B-but...” Ning stared at the Paragon of Pills, somewhat at a loss for words. “All this junior wished for was a few pill-making techniques.”

“Just accept what you have been given,” the Paragon instructed. “If you wish, you can spend the free time you have training in alchemy. It might help inspire you with regards to your swordplay as well.”

“Understood,” Ning said respectfully.

The [Seven Leafpill Chapters] constituted a very complete and perfect alchemy system. It included detailed explanations regarding countless marvelous objects, as well as many different ways by which one could concoct alchemical medicines. Pills like the Pseudo Samsara Pill were actually considered fairly common, low-level pills. The types of pill-making techniques which Ning had wanted for his [Novessence Thunder] technique merely constituted a small portion of what the [Seven Leafpill Chapters] contained.

The Paragon of Pills continued, “Now that you have accepted my techniques... in the future, if you meet people who are extremely skilled in

alchemy, if you so choose you may transmit the very first chapter of the [Seven Leafpill Chapters] to them on my behalf! If they are able to completely master the first chapter, you may then transmit the second chapter. If this person is able to master all three of the first chapters, send that person here to me. Remember – when you help me choose future disciples, you are only permitted to teach them the first three chapters. Although the first three chapters are profound and abstruse, they aren't as valuable as the other four. I have to meet any potential disciple in person and be the one to decide whether or not I will teach them those chapters.”

“Understood,” Ning said respectfully. “This junior has already sworn a lifeblood oath on it.”

The Paragon of Pills slowly shook her head. Due to her connection to the deceased Hegemon, she treated Ning very differently from the way she treated anyone else. She didn't want to force Ning to swear any lifeblood oaths.

However... although she hadn't requested it of him, Ning knew what was the proper way to act. This was a truly shocking, earth-shaking technique. If he one day was to encounter a powerful foe who was able to forcibly soulscour him and steal this technique, then Ning truly would have done wrong by her! But of course, Ning also believed that there weren't many who would be capable of soulscouring him, especially since he would quickly break through to become a Daolord once he returned to the Endless Territories. By then, he would become even more powerful than he was now.

“Take this Dao-seal. This seal was gifted to you by Emperor Maniseal.” The Paragon of Pills tossed a black-white seal made from jade over to him.

Ning accepted it, rather startled. “Emperor Maniseal asked you to give it to me? B-but... I don't even know him...” Ning was so startled that he forgot to respectfully address her as ‘senior’.

“He doesn't know you, but he does know me,” the Paragon of Pills said calmly. “This Dao-seal is fairly valuable. It is of no use to me, but it will be of great use to you. By giving you this Dao-seal, he has sown the seeds of

good karma with me.”

Ning felt even more puzzled. If he wanted to sow the seeds of good karma with you, why would he give a Dao-seal to me? What exactly was the connection between himself and this mysterious alchemist? Still... for even this woman to refer to this Dao-seal as ‘fairly valuable’ meant that it had to be truly extraordinary.

“Once you send your senses into this Dao-seal, you will know how it is used,” the Paragon said.

“Oh. OH!. T-this...” Ning was shocked by what he uncovered. What a terrifying Dao-seal!

This Dao-seal was named the ‘Lifeblood’ Dao-seal. All one had to do was store a drop of blood within it, then hide it in a safe place. Once you perished, you would instantly be reborn from the Dao-seal and the drop of blood within it, no matter what how far away you had died! This... this was equivalent to an extra life!

Right now, Ning had multiple clones of his true body, true, but once he became a Daolord all of his true body’s clones would have to merge together. By then, he would only have his true body and his Primaltwin. If his true body died after that, it would truly be dead. There would be no way to bring it back at all.

This Dao-seal represented a second life for a Daolord. If you died, you would be able to immediately come back to life. However, the inconceivable power hidden within this Dao-seal would be completely consumed after a single usage.

“This Dao-seal is simply incredible. It can actually offer a Daolord a second life!” Ning couldn’t help but sigh in amazement.

What he didn’t realize was that this was merely one of the early prototypes which Emperor Maniseal had created. Emperor Maniseal himself had Lifeblood Dao-seals which could give even Eternal Emperors a second chance at life! However, those Dao-seals were incredibly valuable; there was no way Emperor Maniseal would simply hand them out as gifts! All he wanted to do this time was to give Ning a gift and thus befriend the

Paragon of Pills.

In the future, if he needed to ask her for help, it would be a bit easier for him. It must be understood that the Paragon of Pills truly had poured tremendous amounts of effort into learning the intricacies of reversing spacetime. In this respect, she truly was one of the most skilled experts of all.

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“Whoosh.” Suddenly, a golden-robed figure flew over towards them.

“Master.” The golden-robed figure called out respectfully.

“This is my retainer.” The Paragon glanced at Ning, then instructed, “Yuhong, lead Darknorth in finding a residence for himself. Also – you are not to reveal to anyone the relationship between the two of us!”

“Understood,” the golden-robed elder said respectfully.

“Darknorth.” The Paragon looked at Ning. “The Trileaf Realm has a total of five Eternal Emperors within it, and all five of them are my retainers. Spend some time exploring this realm. I trust it will be of some benefit to you! When you wish to leave, simply let Yuhong know and he will escort you away from here. As for the armor, I’ll return it to you within half a month.”

“Understood,” Ning said, but he couldn’t help but feel secretly stunned. Five Eternal Emperor retainers? Even the almighty Hegemon of the Brightshore Kingdom only had a few Eternal Emperors under his command, right? Was this person before him someone who was on the same level of power as the almighty Hegemon himself?

Chapter 41: Rapid Improvements

“Go,” the Paragon of Pills instructed.

The golden-robed elder and Ji Ning both bowed respectfully, then departed.

As for the Paragon, she simply sat there in the lotus position, head lowered as she stared at the ancient armor. She murmured softly to herself, “Big brother...”

Long, long ago, the Paragon of Pills had personally fashioned this suit of armor, then given it to the person whom she loved the most, her ‘big brother’. The Hegemon had worn it his entire life. Now, as she gently caressed the armor, she felt as though she could sense his presence.

The Paragon shut her eyes, then casually lay down on the ground and nestled her head against the ancient armor. Just like that... she fell asleep.

She was the only person in that entire ancient estate. It was deathly silent here. Without her permission, not even her retainers would dare to enter this place. Long, long ago, she had lived here alongside the Hegemon. Back then, their second brother and third brother had often teased the two of them for being such a pair of lovebird Dao-companions.

And now... she was the only one left.

.....

After departing from the Paragon’s estate, Ning was led away by Yuhong and the two teleported to an estate that was at the top of a mountain.

“This is my own residence.” Daolord Yuhong smiled. “There are quite a few empty manors around here. Choose whichever one you like, Darknorth. Those three over there, the five over there, and also those two over there... all of them are empty.”

Ning swept the area with his gaze, then pointed at a distant manor which was located halfway up a mountain. “That one.”

“I’ll arrange for some servants to go there. Just let me know if there’s

anything you need.” Daolord Yuhong smiled. “I’m quite familiar with the Trileaf Realm.”

“Dare I ask...” Ning suddenly asked something which had been puzzling him. “Who was that lady who brought me here to this place?”

“You don’t even know what my master is named?” Daolord Yuhong was quite shocked. His master was an incredibly exalted figure. For her to personally bring a World-level cultivator like Darknorth to her residence meant that she viewed him in a very special way. How was it that this kid didn’t even know what her name was?

“No idea. I didn’t dare ask,” Ning said.

“If you stay here in the Trileaf Realm long enough, you’ll find out. It’s not really a secret. Master was the one who created the entire Trileaf Realm,” Daolord Yuhong said. “My master is one of the three Primordial Starkings of the Church of Annihilation, the Paragon of Pills.”

Ning’s eyes instantly bulged out. “P-P-Paragon of Pills?”

When the deceased Hegemon had transmitted his legacy to Ning, he had said: “My disciple... if in the future you succeed in the Daomerge and gain eternity, it is my wish that you repay the grace I shall show you today you unto the Paragon of Pills.”

So the mysterious, powerful woman was actually the Paragon of Pills!

“No wonder she treated me in such a special manner,” Ning mused. “The dead Hegemon and the Paragon of Pills clearly had a very special relationship! Both he and the other thirty-five Eternal Emperors all perished in the Prime Reaches of the Genesis Lands... I imagine the Paragon of Pills knows all the secrets behind their deaths.”

“My master is extremely skilled in alchemy. In the Dao of Alchemy, she is the undisputed number one expert of our entire universe. The second-ranked figure has perhaps a tenth of Master’s skills in alchemy. The ten most dazzlingly famous pills and medicines in this entire universe were all forged by Master,” Daolord Yuhong said smugly. “You can imagine for yourself how incredibly talented my master is in the Dao of Alchemy.”

“And that’s not her only skill. Although she hasn’t spent as much effort in artificing and golem-making, she still ranks as one of the top three experts in this universe.” Daolord Yuhong suddenly added smugly, “Her retainer, ‘Emperor Gonflame,’ once studied the art of artificing under her. He has now surpassed her in this regard, and is considered the number one expert in artificing within our universe. When Master told you to go explore the Trileaf Realm, I’m sure that her true goal was for you to go pay a visit to Emperor Gonflame. Cultivators need to be able to acquire suitable weapons, after all. The weapons of others will never be a perfect fit for you; only a custom-forged weapon that was made for you personally will be an ideal fit.”

Ning was secretly speechless. Clearly, the Trileaf Realm had a truly transcendent status within this universe.

The Paragon of Pills was this universe’s foremost expert in alchemy. Her retainer, Emperor Gonflame, was its foremost expert in artificing.

But of course, although it had a transcendent status, what really mattered in the world of major powers was power itself! The lord of the Church of Annihilation had been able to unify his universe thanks to his overwhelmingly great power. Emperor Gonflame might be the number one artificer and weaponsmith, but he was still just a retainer. The reason why he and the other four Eternal Emperors were all willing to be retainers to the Paragon was because of her incredible strength! Similarly, the reason why Emperor Maniseal had gifted Ning a Dao-seal via the Paragon in order to befriend her was because of how strong she was.

“Where does Emperor Gonflame live?” Ning asked.

“Take a look over there.” Daolord Yuhong pointed towards a distant inferno that towered through the heavens. The skies themselves were bathed a fiery red color. “That right there is Emperor Gonflame’s residence. Go pay a visit when you have some free time.”

Ning nodded. “Then I’ll go back to my own residence for now.”

“Come find me if there’s anything you need.” Daolord Yuhong smiled warmly. He certainly wouldn’t dare to treat Ning in a negligent manner.

Ning immediately transformed into a streak of light as he flew towards his own estate.

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The estate already had a number of servants within it. When they saw Ning descend from the skies, they all bowed respectfully. "Greetings, Master."

Ning nodded and smiled at them. "Carry on with your normal tasks. Do not disturb me unless I call for you."

"Yes, Master," they all acknowledged.

Ning immediately entered the estate. As he had descended, he had instantly sent out a stream of Immortal energy and bound the estate to him. Cultivators would only feel at ease if they were in complete control of the estate they were residing in! But of course, when Ning left he would naturally disperse the binding seal he had laid upon the estate.

Ning strode forwards through his estate.

Rumble... a stone door within the estate swung open.

Ning entered the room. Past the stone door was a circular stone disc that was covered with many divine runes. Ning immediately walked forwards, then sat down in the lotus position atop the stone disc. He could sense ripples of power emanate out from the disc to cover him and his heart, causing him to completely calm down. Moments later, the giant stone door swung shut once more.

This was the estate's meditation room.

"Let's take another look." Ning closed his eyes as he once more began to mentally read through the contents of the [Seven Leafpill Chapters]. He spent five full days in the careful reading process.

The [Seven Leafpill Chapters] provided a slow, systemized guide to the art of alchemy. However, Ning didn't need to actually concoct pills, as he mainly needed to learn certain alchemical methods to help him work on his [Novessence Thunder]. Although the alchemical techniques in the

first three chapters were fairly formidable, they were nothing compared to what the final four chapters held! This was especially true for the alchemical techniques held within the seventh chapter. Those were truly incredible, and were most likely the techniques which the Paragon of Pills herself used.

Now that Ning had been able to develop five Supreme Daos and then join them together, he was able to learn technical skills like these quite quickly. Still, he was far from being at the level which the Paragon was at. He had to spend another five full days before he was able to just barely learn and understand the alchemy techniques contained within the seventh chapter.

“Although I’ve only learned half of it, if I used it to actually concoct pills I would be far more effective than if I used all the techniques of the first three chapters.” Ning was in an excellent mood.

“Time to test out the [Novessence Thunder] and the [Novessence Water], I suppose.” Ning could sense that he now had much more control over his lightning and water. The alchemical techniques which the Paragon of Pills had given him had improved his finesse more a thousand times over. No wonder the Paragon had said that if he spent some time and effort on it, it would be easy for him to surpass the creator of the [Novessence Thunder] in alchemical skill. This alchemical system, the [Seven Leafpill Chapters], truly was the most supremely sacred sutra of the Dao of Alchemy.

Ning shut his eyes and began to visualize his body.

Within his Jindan chaos region.

A towering Dao-tree that was 108,000 meters high was here. This tree symbolized Ning’s insights into the Dao of the Sword. In truth, he could break through to the Daolord level whenever he wanted, allowing his Dao-tree to surpass that limit! Ning had actually already reached the World level in many different Daos, such as wind, fire, lightning, and space, but he hadn’t been able to cause new Dao-trees to form for them within his Jindan chaos region.

Crackle! Boom!

The region was filled with flickering lightning essences and gushing water essences that bubbled with power.

“Arise.” The azureflower mist energy spread out, easily taking control over two streaks of Dao lightning. These were the two easiest types of Dao lightning to control; Watersmoke Lightning and Firecloud Lightning.

“The [Seven Leafpill Chapters]...” Ning immediately began to use the Leafpill techniques. Slender threads of slender golden light began to appear, each thread filled with countless divine runes. The threads slowly manifested into a pair of enormous golden hands that gently grasped the two types of Dao lightning, then began to almost pinch them together with ease, continuously harmonizing them.

Slowly, the two streaks of Dao lightning began to transform. The fire and the water merged together, producing a single stream of deep azure lightning.

He had succeeded in merging two types of Dao lightning!

“Too easy.” Ning himself was shocked at how easy it had felt. It had been as easy as breathing.

“I’ll go straight to three types.” Ning was brimming with confidence. Logically speaking, he should’ve first left behind a ‘seed’ for the dual-essence thunder, but he was so confident that he couldn’t even be bothered to do so. He went straight to a tri-essence thunder.

One of the giant golden hands was gripping the bi-essence thunder, while the other golden hand picked up a strand of Earthfiend Lightning. The two quickly began to merge together...

Completing the tri-essence thunder was more than ten times as difficult as completing the bi-essence thunder.

Still... step by step, Ning managed to use the [Novessence Thunder] technique to finalize his tri-essence thunder! The tri-essence thunder was a streak of deep yellow lightning. When the lightning spread out, it contained so much power that it was clearly significantly stronger than

the seven types of Dao lightning and Dao water added together.

Chapter 42: Quadressence Water

A full day passed in the blink of an eye.

For now, Ji Ning resided within a side pavilion within the estate. He just sat there, staring past the railing towards the beautiful scene of the Trileaf Realm outside.

Whoosh. Ning stretched out a finger, causing a strand of deep yellow lightning to jump out from his fingertip. It looked absolutely beautiful, but it contained terrifying amounts of power.

Ning then stretched out a second finger. From this finger, a thin stream of water came pouring out, swirling around his fingertip. The water emanated a beautiful, gemlike aura of green light, but its power was on a slightly lower level than that of the lightning. And yet, a powerful Daolord of the First Step who was touched by this stream of water would be instantly frozen into an ice statue. Even his truesoul would be frozen solid, then crumble into tiny bits.

This was the quadressence Dao water Ning had been able to create.

“Lightning is brutal and wild. To tame and control lightning is more difficult than taming and controlling water.” Ning nodded slowly. “For now, creating tri-essence thunder is my limit. To master quadressence thunder is far too difficult.”

Both the lightning and the water could go up to the ‘novessence’ level. However, the difficulty level would skyrocket with each additional essence. According to what Daolord Allgod had said, a Daolord of the First Step would be able to just barely master the tri-essence thunder. A Daolord of the Second Step had a chance to master the pentessence thunder, a Daolord of the Third Step might be able to master the heptessence thunder, while a Daolord of the Fourth Step would be able to master the complete Novessence Thunder! Ning was still merely at the World level. It was all thanks to the azureflower mist energy and the [Seven Leafpill Chapters] that he was able to master the tri-essence thunder.

“For now, my most powerful killing attack is once more the ‘Yin-Yang

Sword Domain’.” Ning couldn’t help but let out a laugh. This was clearly a defensive technique, but because of his upgrade powerful multi-essence Dao water and Dao lightning it was now his most powerful killing technique as well!

“Oh, right.” Ning waved his hand, causing a figure to appear out of nowhere. It was World God Pillsaint, and he had a rather blank look on his face. He was dressed in loose red robes. A smear of grease could be seen on his red lips and his white teeth.

“Oh, Master.” World God Pillsaint started to laugh when he saw Ning. “I was wondering what was going on. I was in the middle of a meal when the world around me suddenly changed.”

“You might’ve been having fun stuffing your face with food, but I’ve been freaking out for quite some time now.” Ning laughed. When he had been abducted by the Paragon of Pills, he truly had felt quite nervous. Thankfully, it had been a good thing in the end.

“What happened?” World God Pillsaint was rather puzzled as he scanned his surroundings. “And where are we? And right, where is Youji? Didn’t you have a number of comrades travelling with you, Master? Why are you sitting here by yourself? Heeeeey... and it seems as though you have some servants here as well.”

Ning shook his head. “Good lord, you talk a lot. Just shut your mouth for a moment.”

World God Pillsaint immediately fell silent.

“I asked you to come out because I wanted to bestow some good fortune upon you,” Ning said.

“Good fortune?” World God Pillsaint was puzzled.

“Right. Don’t fight back.” As Ning spoke, he reached out with a finger and tapped Pillsaint on his forehead.

Ning directly transmitted the first chapter of the [Seven Leafpill Chapters] directly into Pillsaint’s mind. According to what the Paragon of Pills had said, Ning was at most permitted to transmit the first three

chapters to certain people of his choosing! If Pillsaint was able to learn the first three chapters in a fairly short period of time, Ning would be permitted to bring Pillsaint before the Paragon, at which point he might earn a truly great opportunity for himself.

Ning had to do this right away. Once they went back to their own universe, it would most likely be close to impossible for them to return to this universe again.

A long while later...

“Wow. T-t-this is... this is absolutely inconceivable. Inconceivable! This is TRUE alchemy! Absolutely incredible! Compared to this, the crap I learned in the past can’t even be called alchemy!” World God Pillsaint began to scream with excitement.

Ning couldn’t help but start to laugh upon seeing this.

“This is simply marvelous! You can actually use alchemy like this?! A completely new world, a completely new Dao of Alchemy, has opened up before my eyes!” Pillsaint only grew increasingly excited as he spoke. He stared at Ning, his eyes blazing with excitement. “But Master... it seems as though you only transmitted part of a complete technique to me?”

“Yes, this is just the first chapter,” Ning said.

“And the rest?” Pillsaint was extremely excited. Alchemy and pill-making was his area of specialty. He was already delirious with joy upon having received the first chapter of the [Seven Leafpill Chapters], a supreme, sacred manual for the Dao of Alchemy.

“After you fully master the first chapter, I’ll naturally transmit the second chapter to you,” Ning said.

“Second chapter? Does that mean there’s also a third chapter? And a fourth chapter?” Pillsaint was so excited that his face had turned beet-red. “Who created this alchemy technique? My master was a Daolord who was extremely skilled in alchemy and quite famous, but compared to what you just transmitted to me... he is way, way, waaaay inferior! I insist on becoming apprenticed to the person who created this technique!”

Ning shook his head. "You might want to become that person's apprentice, but that person might not want to accept you. Calm down and focus on learning the technique I just transmitted to you, and you might have a chance in the future."

"Right, right!" Pillsaint nodded repeatedly.

"Master." Pillsaint suddenly fell to his knees, intending to kowtow.

Ning was stunned. He hurriedly lifted Pillsaint back up to his feet. "Pillsaint, what are you doing?!"

"Master, you might not understand what this alchemy technique represents. To me... this is a new path, a new Dao that leads to the greatest heights of my profession. This... this is the true Dao of Alchemy. I'll be able use it to become a Daolord... and perhaps rise to even greater heights." Pillsaint said gratefully, "I, Pillsaint, have no way of repaying you for your gift of the Dao..."

Ning nodded. "All you have to do is study hard."

This Dao of Alchemy led all the way to the Eternal Emperor level! By using this Dao, Pillsaint might very well become an Eternal Emperor himself.

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Now that he saw a chance to become a Daolord, Pillsaint began to spend all of his time in frenzied study and training. Ning had merely memorized some of the pill-making techniques, but Pillsaint was thoroughly analyzing and studying every aspect of the technique. He even went as far as to try them out in actual pill-making. Pillsaint truly was quite talented in alchemy, but he never had a teacher as good as this. Although his previous master was quite talented, he was still significantly inferior to even the likes of Daolord Allgod, to say nothing of the Paragon of Pills.

Now that this opportunity had come before him, Pillsaint truly had a chance to soar into the heavens.

Ning knew very well that his foundation was still the Dao of the Sword! He was mainly going to make use of the [Seven Leafpill Chapters] to learn

more about alchemy. Pillsaint was his retainer; it would be of tremendous help to Ning if Pillsaint was to become an incredible grandmaster alchemist.

The day after transmitting the first chapter to Pillsaint, Ning departed from his estate and transformed into a streak of light which flew off into the distance.

“My name is Darknorth. Greetings, fellow Daoist.”

“Greetings, fellow Daoist Darknorth.”

Ning encountered quite a few World-level cultivators on his journey. On occasion, he even met a few Daolords.

The Trileaf Realm was an incredibly vast world, much like how the Brightshore Kingdom itself also contained countless living beings and cultivators.

“Emperor Gonflame?” Ning spent more than six hours flying and teleporting at top speed before finally reaching Emperor Gonflame’s residence.

“This is the Emperor’s residence. Outsiders are not permitted to enter.” Two novices were guarding the gates to the estate. They immediately barked at Ning upon seeing him fly over.

“This junior has heard of the Emperor’s skill in artificing and thus has come to greet him. I wonder if I might be fortunate enough as to have an audience with him?” Ning asked.

“So you’ve come to purchase treasures?” One of the novices pointed off into the distance. “Enter from the side entrance. Someone will help take care of you. Don’t you even know which door you are supposed to enter through? This here is the main entrance. Generally speaking, major powers who have come to meet with our Emperor will wait here as we send the message to him.”

“Pardon me for my rudeness.” Ning didn’t really mind. He immediately flew towards the side entrance.

As for the two novices, they continued to stand there in front of the estate in a smug manner. Their master was the number one artificer in their entire universe. Quite a few people came to ask to meet him. Even Eternal Emperors came to request a meeting, to say nothing of Daolords. All of them had to first go through the novices. This naturally made them arrogant and dismissive towards a mere World-level cultivator.

“Gah? Are there so many treasures here that they stack them up in front of the entrance?” As Ning flew towards the side entrance, he couldn’t help but feel shocked upon moving closer.

Although it was just the side entrance, it was still dozens of meters wide. There were quite a few servants there, as well as three treasures which hovered above the entrance. One was a pearl that glimmered with fiery light and which emanated faint ripples of might. The second was a white flower that emanated waves of white light, bringing a sense of peace and harmony to those who were bathed in it. The final treasure was a painting depicted a world of mountains and rivers.

“Fellow Daoist, have you come to purchase treasures?” In front of the door stood a female servant with unbound hair who emanated the aura of a Daolord. Most likely, she was a Daolord of the First Step, and she smiled at Ning as she spoke.

“I am.” Ning nodded.

“Please enter, fellow Daoist. Any of the treasures you see inside are for sale.” Although Ning was at the World level, the female servant didn’t show discourtesy as a result of it. The treasures they had here were all for sale, and they were all items which Emperor Gonflame made in a casual manner when testing out certain ideas. Despite that, they were still items which would drive Daolords in the outside world utterly mad with desire.

Ning stepped into the residence, and things immediately changed. As soon as he passed through the doorway, it was as though he entered a vast expanse in outer space, filled with countless twinkling stars.

There were cultivators walking through this region of void-like space, as well as servants and attendants who were waiting on them. They strolled

through the void, gesturing at the various stars. Every single 'star' was actually a treasure.

"This treasure costs three million? That's a bit too expensive, right? Can you lower the price a bit?"

"I'll buy this one!"

The Daolords here all acted in a very humble manner. Emperor Gonflame's store didn't hold any treasures which were less than a million cubes of chaos nectar, but what it did have drove countless cultivators mad with desire. As for the World-level cultivators... almost all of them only came for window shopping. They'd browse through the items but not buy them. They were really here just to expand their horizons.

When Ning entered this region of void-like space, the attendants all glanced at him. Although they all had courteous looks on their faces, in their hearts they muttered to themselves, "Ugh, another World-level cultivator, here to look but not to buy."

Chapter 43: Ji Ning's Sword

There were only so many attendants in the store, and the majority of them were busy accompanying the Daolords. As a result, Ji Ning was by himself after entering the place.

“Damned impressive.” Ning stared at the many treasures in the void, all of which gleamed like shining stars. The very first treasure he took a close look at gave him a bad shock.

Every single treasure was protected by restrictive spells, which was why they glittered like stars from afar. By sending your senses out, you would be able to gain some detailed information regarding each treasure. As for this first one, it was a shuttle-type magic treasure.

“Woodfire Azuresun Shuttle. It takes three thousand years and ten thousand cubes of chaos nectar for it to be charged up. After it is charged up, it can be used a single time and unleash the power of a Daolord of the Fourth Step. The cost is eight million cubes of chaos nectar!”

“It can only be used once each time?” Ning was secretly speechless. “It seems you really can’t predict the power of a Daolord just by looking at him. He might look weak, but have a ridiculous treasure like this. Thank goodness that treasures like this are ridiculously expensive.”

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Ji Ning went through one magic treasure after another. Ordinary Eternal weapons filled with sword-intent and saber-intent were fairly cheap; few of them could breach the million cube price range. The ones which Emperor Gonflame had put out for display all had certain special properties.

All the magic treasures here were special in some way, which was why they exceeded a million cubes in price.

“A Heart eater Clock. It contains a secret art of a Heartforce Cultivator Daolord of the Fourth Step. When activated, it can attack the enemy’s mind and cause weaker enemy’s to completely lose control. The price is

fifty million cubes.”

“This is insane.” Ning was truly frightened by this treasure. He knew very well that in a life-and-death battle, to lose focus for even an instant could result in you dying and your Dao vanishing! This item was clearly described as having a secret art of a Daolord of the Fourth Step who was a Heartforce Cultivator. The power of the attack had to be extraordinary! For a non-Heartforce Cultivator to be able to suddenly unleash a heartforce attack of such power... this treasure was truly insane in power.

But the price was insane as well. Fifty million cubes? Very few Verge-level Daolords would be willing or able to buy such a thing.

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There were evasive-type magic treasures that would allow you to instantly flee at a hundred times the speed of light.

There were formation-type treasures which, when used, would trap the opponent so thoroughly that it would be almost impossible for him to escape.

There was even a sword-formation formed from a total of 216 high-grade Eternal swords of extraordinary power. It was perfect for a Ki Refining Daolord of the Fourth Step, and the more powerful the Daolord was the more power the sword-formation could unleash.

There was also a particularly priceless sin-treasure which contained a total of 999 sinfiends. Every single sinfiend was comparable to a Daolord of the Third Step in might, and once this treasure was unleashed it could decimate ordinary Daolords of the Fourth Step. However, this treasure truly was ‘priceless’, in that you could only barter for it with Emperor Gonflame by using incredibly valuable treasures of your own.

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After Ning saw this treasure, he mumbled to himself, “Once I merge my nine types of Dao lightning into my Novessence Thunder, I’ll be able to wipe out Daolords of the Fourth Step as well. Even if thousands of sinfiends attack me, my lightning will be able to wipe them all out.”

After finishing his viewings, he felt rather speechless. Still, the majority of these treasures weren't really useful to him, because he already had those five powerful golems! In addition, he would quickly become a Daolord upon returning to the Endless Territories. When that happened, his [Novessence Thunder] and his [Novessence Water] would rapidly grow in power. There really weren't that many treasures which would attract Ji Ning's interest.

The ones that did were way too expensive!

The cheapest of evasive treasures, for example, started at ten million cubes... and those only moved nine times faster than the speed of light. As for the ones which allowed you to flee at a hundred times the speed of light, they were similarly priceless and could only be procured through trading treasures of your own.

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Ning stared at a distant treasure, his gaze rather distant. He murmured to himself, "This is what I really need."

It was exactly what he needed, and it was also something he could afford.

Off in the distance, a snow-white sword that emanated an aura of endless coldness could be seen hovering in the air. He sent out a slight strand of mental power and was able to immediately know what this sword did.

"A lifeblood weapon. The cultivator can pour all of his insights regarding his Sword Dao into this weapon to charge it with a Sword Dao quintessence. When you use a weapon which is perfectly aligned with your own Sword Dao, it will be able to unleash the most amount of power! You can use it to continuously perfect and upgrade your Sword Dao! In addition, lifeblood weapons are all created from incredibly precious materials and can grow alongside you. If your Sword Dao is strong enough and you feed it enough precious materials, then with a bit of luck you might very well give birth to a Universe weapon in the future. The price is thirty million cubes."

“So this is a lifeblood weapon,” Ning murmured to himself. He had heard of them long ago, but not even the Sword Palace’s Armaments Valley held any. lifeblood weapons were simply too rare; whenever a grandmaster artificer managed to finally produce one after an enormous amount of effort, other cultivators would immediately charge forwards to purchase it.

Lifblood weapons were given that name because they truly became one with the cultivators who wielded them, and the quintessence within them would be created and formed by their wielders. But more importantly than that, they could also grow and become increasingly powerful!

They were the perfect weapons for cultivators, the weapons which could truly unleash a cultivator’s maximum potential! If Ning used an ‘ordinary’ weapon, he would probably only be able to unleash 30% to 40% of the amount of power he could unleash if he was using his own lifeblood weapon! This was what made lifeblood weapons so powerful... and they could grow without any limitations.

Generally speaking, top-grade Eternal swords were the best weapons you could buy. But lifeblood weapons could continuously grow alongside you, growing more powerful as you yourself did. In the hands of others, it would perhaps merely be an ordinary top-grade Eternal weapon, but in the hands its true master, it would be countless times more powerful.

Almost all Eternal Emperors used lifeblood weapons... and if evolved and empowered to a sufficient degree, lifeblood weapons had a chance of transforming into Universe weapons!

“The Palace of the Sword is filled with sword cultivators, and whenever any of them discover a lifeblood weapon they will go crazy for it.” Ning’s gaze was blazing with eagerness. “Who would’ve thought I’d run into one such weapon here in this alternate universe?”

Lifblood weapons could only truly fuse with their very first master. Once that first master perished, they would become nothing more than ordinary weapons.

“This is what I really need. My Sword Dao encompasses all aspects of all

sword-arts. It is extremely difficult for me to find a sword which suits my Dao,” Ning mused. “I need a lifeblood sword that will become as powerful as I myself will!”

“Fellow Daoist.” Ning glanced at a nearby attendant and sent him a mental message. The Daolord attendant glanced back at him, puzzled. What did this World-level cultivator want?

“I need this lifeblood weapon,” Ning sent.

“Lifeblood weapon?!” The distant attendant was badly shocked by this request. He hurriedly walked over, stepping through the void of space as he quickly arrived next to Ning. “Fellow Daoist.” The attendant hurriedly smiled at Ning.

“Can you lower the price of this lifeblood weapon a bit?” Ning asked.

“If you are friends with the Emperor or perhaps know his senior disciples, they might cut you a deal. I’m just a lowly attendant; I don’t have that authority,” the attendant said. “This sword is a lifeblood weapon that was forged just a short while ago. If you wait just a bit longer, I imagine other sword cultivators would appear and immediately snatch it up.”

Ning nodded. Sword cultivators were devoted to the sword. All you needed was one sword to be completely devoted to, then use it to destroy all other arts. Foes might use all sorts of strange techniques and spells, but when my sword emerges it shall shatter the heavens and crush the earth, wiping out all in its path! Ning’s own Sword Dao was already quite terrifying. When matched with a suitable lifeblood weapon... that would be adding strength atop of strength.

Any sword cultivator would be willing to sacrifice all of his other treasures for the chance to acquire a lifeblood sword.

“Thirty million cubes...” Ning stared at that snow-white sword, emanating that aura of freezing cold. This truly was a painful price, as the deceased Hegemon had only given him fifty million cubes. His darkspace flamestone hoard was only worth ten million cubes.

“I’ll buy it.” Ning nodded.

“Please wait a moment. I’ll go make a report,” the attendant said. “I don’t have the power to release the restrictive spells binding this lifeblood sword.”

“Alright.” Ning nodded in understanding. One couldn’t be too careful with lifeblood swords. If someone was able to so much as touch them, the sword would be ruined for anyone else and become nothing more than an ordinary weapon. The first binding performed on a lifeblood weapon was critical, as only the first binding could be a true, complete one.

The attendant left to make his report. As for Ning, he just stared at the sword, murmuring to himself, “It’d be wonderful if I could acquire six lifeblood swords. I’d be even stronger.” But of course, if anyone heard Ning’s secret wish, they would probably laugh themselves to death. A single lifeblood sword was already a treasure of incalculable value. SIX of them? Who would even dare think of such a thing?

Just a short while later, the attendant reappeared. Only, he had a rather strange look on his face when he looked at Ning, almost as though he was looking at some sort of monster.

“Uh, Fellow Daoist.” The attendant was noticeably more humble and respectful than he was previously. “Can you please follow me this way?”

“Eh?” Ning glanced at him.

The attendant sent mentally, “The Emperor has ordered for you to go meet him.”

“The Emperor?” Ning was stunned.

“My Emperor, of course... which is to say, Emperor Gonflame,” the attendant sent back. He was truly puzzled. Normally, it was other major powers who would attempt to request a meeting with Emperor Gonflame. Why was Emperor Gonflame actively inviting this young World-level cultivator?

Chapter 44: Emperor Gonflame

Emperor Gonflame wished to meet him? Ji Ning hesitated for a moment. He was nothing more than a World-level cultivator. There was probably only one possible reason why Emperor Gonflame wished to meet him in person...

The Paragon of Pills!

Emperor Gonflame was one of the retainers of the Paragon of Pills, while the Paragon had an extraordinarily close relationship with Ning's deceased Hegemon master. Most likely, she could be considered his master's wife, almost like a godmother.

"Lead the way," Ning said.

"Follow me." The attendant immediately led the way forwards, but in his heart he couldn't help but feel puzzled at what the relationship was between this young World-level cultivator and his Emperor was.

The attendant led Ning forwards. A short while later, it was an Emperor-level retainer who personally led the way for Ning.

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A short while later, they reached an enormous, peaceful courtyard. There were two lakes within the courtyard, one of which was filled with a blazing, lava-like liquid. As for the second lake, it was filled with a freezing liquid that was so cold as to cause the surrounding area to be blanketed in frost. Between that blazing lake and the freezing lake was an ancient, stunted-looking tree that was nonetheless large in size.

Beneath the tree, there was a table, a chair, and a man.

The fiery-haired man's upper body was uncovered, and he sat there while weighing Ning with a judging look in his eyes.

"Emperor," the retainer said respectfully, "Darknorth has arrived."

"You may leave," Emperor Gonflame instructed. The retainer immediately withdrew, leaving behind only Ning and Emperor Gonflame.

“This junior greets you, Emperor.” Ning bowed respectfully.

“No need to stand on ceremony with me, Darknorth. Come, sit.”

Emperor Gonflame smiled and gestured towards the seat opposite him. Seeing this, Ning followed his gesture and sat down.

“Have a taste. The wine here was delivered to me by the various Daolords who have asked me to help them create various treasures. I don’t even know the names of half of the wine here, nor do I care. I’ve already spent countless amounts of effort researching and analyzing the properties of various materials and ingredients. I have no interest in doing the same for my food and wine as well,” Emperor Gonflame said.

Ning nodded. “I can imagine how much effort it took for you to rise to the level of being the number one artificer of this entire universe.”

“I actually happen to like being an artificer. When I followed Master, I was nothing more than one of her many disciples and retainers. I was a completely unremarkable figure.” A reminiscent look was in Emperor Gonflame’s eyes. “I was fairly slow in improving as a cultivator, but I really did like working as an artificer, and so I poured all of my efforts into this field instead. Who would’ve thought that I would end up becoming a Daolord of the Fourth Step, and then just naturally break through to become an Eternal Emperor? Only later did I realize that Master had been paying close attention to me in secret. She had helped guide me and assist me on numerous occasions without me even realizing it.”

Ning couldn’t help but secretly sigh. For Emperor Gonflame to have gained eternity was proof that if you truly devoted yourself to a particular trade or craft, you could make miracles happen! But of course, that was also only if you had a major power like the Paragon of Pills guiding your path. The Paragon was one of the three ancient Primordial Starkings who had existed since the birth of this universe, after all. Even though she didn’t spend much time or effort on artificing, she still ranked as one of the top three in this universe. For her to help guide Emperor Gonflame in this was naturally quite simple for her.

If he had just blindly studied without having such a wise teacher, it was

unlikely that he would've been able to gain eternity!

"I noticed you as soon as you arrived here." Emperor Gonflame looked at Ning.

"Huh?" Ning was startled.

"Mm. You weren't overwhelmed with desire despite seeing so many treasures placed before you. In the end, you chose a lifeblood weapon." Emperor Gonflame smiled and nodded. "Not bad. It seems you understand that in order to become a truly powerful figure, you still have to rely on your own power. To rely on strange curios and ancient artifacts... that path is a path which rarely leads to becoming truly unstoppable."

"You are a sword cultivator. The sword cultivators who truly were the dominant forces of their era all relied on the nothing more than the sword in their hands, or perhaps the powerful secret arts they might've come up with," Emperor Gonflame said.

Ning nodded, understanding what was being imparted. In the ancient library of the Sword Palace, he had seen quite a few secret arts and thus understood that many of the more powerful Daolords relied on mighty secrets arts they had developed. This was true for virtually all of the monstrously talented ones!

"The most terrifyingly powerful Daolords and Emperors all have their own unique techniques." Emperor Gonflame sighed. "Some Daolords have such powerful abilities that even I would rather keep my distance from them. For example, there is a Daolord I know named Daolord Otherpath who used his own Dao to create a truly unearthly secret art. He managed to completely merge himself into the Wugang Sea of Glass, something which naturally formed from the primordial chaos. After mastering the Wugang Glass Form, with but a thought he can transform into the vast sea of glass and sent it surging towards you. Upon being trapped by it... even someone like me would probably perish."

Ning was secretly speechless. Still, it made sense. Shortly after leaving the Three Realms, he had encountered Daolord Badlands. Although he was merely a Daolord of the Third Step, his Numerancy divination powers

were simply too incredible. Whenever he divined that danger was near, he would immediately slink away, making it almost impossible to kill him. Even worse – if you offended him but were unable to kill him, he would be able to divine all sorts of ways to deal with you or act against your interests. This was why Daolord Badlands was actually quite a dangerous person.

“Those unearthly Daolords have all trained their own Daos to an absolute apex, giving them inconceivable amounts of power. Even worse, they all but seek out excuses to try and kill an Emperor so as to establish their reputations.” Emperor Gonflame shook his head and sighed. “Gaining eternity is no easy feat, and yet the weaker Eternal Emperors are hunted down so mercilessly that they don’t even dare to show their faces in the world.”

Ning couldn’t help but grin. The same was true in the Endless Territories. Daolord Allgod had chased Emperor Melobo across the entire universe, while Lord Dawnstar of the Saber Palace had once slain an Eternal Emperor with three blows of his saber! This was why there were so few Eternal Emperors around, with the surviving ones all figures of incredible strength. The three Hegemons of the Endless Territories were good examples, as was Emperor Mirrorsnow who was extremely skilled at staying alive. Emperor Trisilk was another figure who was also skilled at survival.

“Magic treasures, bah... one or two is enough. If you spend all your efforts on collecting magic treasures, you’ll never make it too far!” Emperor Gonflame looked at Ning. “Although I am very wary of those monstrously strong Daolords, I have to say that they have chosen the correct path. If they succeed and gain eternity, they shall become Hegemons amongst emperors. They’ll immediately be granted the position of ‘Starking’ within the Church of Annihilation, and they’ll be incredibly strong ones at that.”

Ning couldn’t help but ask curiously, “Aren’t all the Starkings of the Church of Annihilation at the Hegemon level?”

“No way. Impossible!” Emperor Gonflame shook his head. “They are

simply strong Eternal Emperors who were chosen to become Starkings. If they were Hegemons, they wouldn't be 'chosen' as Starkings; they simply would BE Starkings. Take Emperor Maniseal for example; I heard he's ridiculously powerful in the Dao of Seals, but he's still a ways off from the Hegemon level."

"Or consider the three Primordial Starkings. They always had transcendent statuses, precisely because all three of them were Hegemons," Emperor Gonflame said.

"Oh." Ning nodded. So as he had expected, the Paragon of Pills was indeed a Hegemon.

"The Paragon of Pills is a truly incredible figure," Emperor Gonflame said. "According to the legends, she was a monster even back when she was merely a Daolord, capable of killing Eternal Emperors with ease. Only after gaining eternity did she become a Hegemon! However... there are no absolutes. The legends supposedly say that a long, long time ago, she wasn't a Hegemon. Only after training for many years as an Eternal Emperor did she reach the Hegemon level of power."

"Emperor Maniseal, in turn, was once an unremarkable Emperor who completely focused on his Dao of Seals. By now, he's become incredibly powerful." Emperor Gonflame chuckled. "After you become an Emperor, you can still slowly train your way up and become increasingly powerful, and you'll even have a shot at the Hegemon level. However... actually succeeding in this endeavor is far too difficult. Countless years have gone by, but the only person to succeed in doing so was the Paragon of Pills."

Ning was shocked. Back in the Brightshore Kingdom, he had heard that Hegemons were only created when the most powerful of Daolords gained eternity! He never would've imagined that the Paragon was actually an exception to the rule. It really was an axiom that the path of cultivation was a path where there would always be a 'final chance' given.

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Emperor Gonflame chatted with Ning for quite some time, broadening Ning's horizons.

“Now, you want a lifeblood weapon, right?” Emperor Gonflame looked at Ning, then laughed. “That’ll be easy. This is our very first meeting, and so I’ll gift you with a lifeblood weapon as my first meeting gift to you.”

“Wonderful.” Ning revealed a look of delight.

He knew that there were differences amongst freshly-forged lifeblood weapons. Some might be incredibly heavy and would be suitable for ferocious stances such as his Heavenbreaker stance. Others might be a better fit for his Blood Drop stance or his Shadowless stance. But of course, lifeblood weapons could be continuously improved and altered. Even if the weapon didn’t start off as a good fit, as more time passed it would become a better and better fit for its master!

But a lifeblood treasure which started off as a perfect fit would naturally grow powerful even faster. For the number one grandmaster artificer in this universe to personally forge a lifeblood weapon for himself... this truly was a rare opportunity.

“Emperor, please take a look at this.” Ning immediately began to put his sword-arts on display. “My Sword Dao is composed of five separate Supreme Daos.”

As Ning put his sword-arts on display, the watching Emperor Gonflame felt a sense of tremendous shock.

“W-what... you’ve even linked them together perfectly? This is something which includes all aspects of the entire Dao of the Sword!” Emperor Gonflame stared at Ning. If this kid continues to grow and develop, he’ll definitely become not just a powerful Daolord, but one of the most monstrously powerful Daolords. He’ll probably be able to kill some weaker Eternal Emperors with just one blow from his sword.

“Emperor.” After finishing displaying his sword-arts, Ning looked towards Emperor Gonflame.

“Um...” Emperor Gonflame rubbed his chin. “Your lifeblood weapon would have to reach the apex of perfection in every single aspect. It won’t be easy to make, and it’ll require a lot of materials.”

It would only cost him around ten million cubes of chaos nectar if he wished to make a lifeblood sword for an ordinary sword cultivator, and if he wished to sell it on the open market it would probably go for around twenty or thirty million cubes. But Darknorth's Sword Dao was a Dao which covered all types of sword-arts, a Dao which pursued true perfection. The materials alone would probably cost him thirty million cubes!

"Haha. Well, since I promised I'd forge you one, I'll forge you one." Emperor Gonflame laughed. "I won't go broke from just one weapon."

"Emperor," Ning suddenly said, "This junior has a rather... outrageous request."

"An outrageous request?" Emperor Gonflame laughed. "Don't be shy. Speak." He had just promised to give away thirty million cubes worth of precious materials. Right now, he was feeling quite generous and magnanimous.

"You've already seen this junior's sword-arts. To be honest... it'd be perfect if I had six lifeblood swords. In that case, my power would multiply many times over." Ning said hurriedly, "But of course, this junior wouldn't dare to ask you to gift me with six... if there's anything you need, just tell me and I will do my utmost to accomplish it. I also have some precious treasures and some chaos nectar. I definitely would never ask you to operate at a loss."

Ning truly did deeply desire six lifeblood weapons. He wanted six, no matter what it had to cost him. Given how much face Emperor Gonflame was giving him, he'd probably offer those six weapons at a very low cost. Logically speaking, Ning felt he should be able to afford it.

"SIX?!!?" Emperor Gonflame's eyes bulged out. "Six LIFELOOD weapons? Your request really is outrageous!"

Chapter 45: Some Interesting Information

“Just tell me how much you need, Emperor,” Ji Ning said shamelessly. For a young World-level cultivator like himself to be shameless in front of an Eternal Emperor didn’t really matter that much. If it meant acquiring six lifeblood weapons, a bit of thick-skinned shamelessness was nothing.

Emperor Gonflame was speechless. “Six lifeblood weapons. Let’s put aside the amount of exhausting work that I’d have to put into it. Six lifeblood weapons... do you even know how much the materials alone would cost? Do you have any idea? You actually dare make the wild claim that you’d cover it?”

“How much would it cost, exactly?” Ning asked.

“To make customized swords for you? Your swords would be different from all other lifeblood weapons. Your Sword Dao encompasses all directions, which means that the lifeblood weapon also has to be truly perfect in every single aspect! The materials alone will probably cost at least three times as much as the materials needed for an ‘ordinary’ lifeblood weapon. It would take a total of thirty million cubes of chaos nectar. Six swords would cost a hundred and eighty million cubes!”

Emperor Gonflame suddenly started to laugh uncontrollably as he looked at Ning. “Fine, I promised to give you one for free, so you’ll only have to compensate me a hundred and fifty million cubes. As for all of my time, effort, and labor... we’ll just consider it as being on the house. Heh. Heh heh. You said you will make sure I’m not operating at a loss, right? Can you give me that much?”

Ning was speechless. He truly wasn’t able to say a single word.

A hundred and fifty million cubes?

This was way, way...

Daolord Solesky of Vastheaven Palace was an extremely powerful Verge-level Daolord. In order to procure the assistance of Daolord Badlands, he had put together a collection of nearly twenty million cubes worth of

chaos nectar, which represented virtually his entire treasure hoard. But of course, the treasures and weapons which he used in battle and which was part of his own 'true strength', he naturally didn't sell.

For most major powers, even if they sold off all of their most valuable treasures they still probably wouldn't be able to come up with a hundred million cubes!

"Weeeell?" Emperor Gonflame looked at Ning, then said teasingly, "Weren't you talking big, just now, about how you'd make it up to me?"

Ning was furiously racking his brain for ideas. What should he do? He had quite a few treasures, but he wasn't even close to a hundred and fifty million cubes worth of treasure. Emperor Gonflame wished to give the Paragon of Pills face and so was willing to gift him thirty million cubes of ingredients; this was already beyond generous. It must be remembered that when Emperor Gonflame had made that offer, he had only been planning on making an ordinary lifeblood weapon that would cost him around ten million cubes. Who would've thought that Ning's Sword Dao was this incredible? Emperor Gonflame couldn't go back on his words, and so had been so generous as to promise Ning an appropriate and even more expensive weapon.

But six? Even Ning himself felt that such a request went too far, and the Emperor probably wouldn't agree. Such a sum of wealth would cause even someone like Emperor Gonflame to feel heartache.

"Eh?!" A thought suddenly flashed through Ning's mind. "Emperor," Ning called out.

Emperor Gonflame had been enjoying the intensely awkward look on Ning's face. He couldn't help but feel curious upon hearing Ning call out to him. "What is it? Do you actually have enough treasure to make up for it?"

Ning did, of course, have enough treasure. The deceased Hegemon's suit of ancient armor alone was worth vastly more than six lifeblood weapons. That suit of armor had been labored over by the Paragon of Pills herself, and it truly was of inestimable value. There was nowhere and no way to

buy a treasure like that! As for the two Dao-seals which the deceased Hegemon had given him, the deceased Hegemon had poured all of his effort into the creation of each Dao-seal. They similarly could not be found anywhere on any market, and they would indeed more than make up for the lifeblood weapons as well.

But Ning would never sell them, not unless he truly lost his mind. Ultimate trump cards like this simply were not to be sold.

“This junior has a bit of information to trade,” Ning said. “I think... this bit of information should be worth a hundred and fifty million cubes of chaos nectar.”

“Information? What sort of information could possibly be worth that much?” Emperor Gonflame was intrigued.

“Emperor,” Ning said, “When this junior first entered the Archaeus region, I once accidentally encountered a place where I discovered an enormous, mountain-sized vein of darkspace flamestone. This mountain was more than a million kilometers in size.”

Emperor Gonflame had been quite calm, but upon hearing the words ‘million kilometers’ he was completely stunned. He shot to his feet, staring at Ning with round eyes. “What did you just say? A million kilometers in size? A mountain of darkspace flamestone?”

“Yes.” Ning nodded immediately.

“How rich is the vein?” Emperor Gonflame asked.

A ‘vein’ could mean many things. A ‘vein’ of ore in which ten thousand kilograms of rock held roughly one kilogram of pure ore would be considered a ‘vein’, but so too would a ‘vein’ in which a billion kilograms of rock held a kilogram of pure ore! The difference between the two, however, was enormous.

“Please take a look, Emperor.” Ning waved his hand, causing a piece of ore to appear. This was one of the pieces of ore which the golem Moksha had mined.

“This ore...” Emperor Gonflame was instantly excited when he saw that

piece of ore. He was a true grandmaster of artificing, and he could immediately tell right away that it came from an incredibly rich vein. “A million kilometers of this... I... I... I’m not strong enough to own such a mountain.”

This mountain of ore was so large and valuable that someone like him truly wasn’t qualified to claim ownership over it. In fact, Emperor Gonflame didn’t even consider trying. He was a retainer of the Paragon of Pills, after all. There was no way he could hide something like this from her. And a mine of this size... if the Paragon of Pills claimed it, there would be no one who would dare to do anything to it.

“But there is something I must tell you. This mine already has an owner,” Ning said.

“An owner?” Emperor Gonflame was stunned.

“Emperor Trisilk,” Ning said.

Emperor Gonflame started to roar with laughter. “Ahahaha! Him? That poor, stupid bastard?” Right now, Emperor Trisilk truly was the most unfortunate Eternal Emperor in this entire universe. Emperor Maniseal was hunting him so relentlessly that he didn’t dare to show his face anywhere.”

“Come, follow me. Let us go meet with my master.” Emperor Gonflame grabbed Ning, then stepped through the void and teleported out of his estate.

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This truly was a piece of earth-shaking information. Even the Paragon of Pills was shocked upon hearing it, and she immediately led Ning and Emperor Gonflame away from the Trileaf Realm and towards the Archaeus region.

Whoosh.

The five-colored space bridge continuously soared into the distance. The Paragon, Ning, and Emperor Gonflame all stood there atop the bridge. Since Ning had fled from the Sacred Immortal Realm after they had

destroyed the formation protecting it, he knew exactly where it was located. This made finding it much easier.

Rumble...

“Here we are.”

The black-garbed Paragon put away her bridge, then stood there in the emptiness of space with Emperor Gonflame and Ji Ning by her side.

The blazing flames in this region weren't able to even move close to them. The Paragon, Emperor Gonflame, and Ning all stared through the void towards the towering mountain formed from fiery red rock.

“What an enormous vein of ore.” Emperor Gonflame was truly stunned. “Although Darknorth told me about how large it is, actually seeing it is... wow. How could there be a mountain of darkspace flamestone as large as this?”

“It's too large. There's no way to teleport it away. Our only choice is to slowly mine it for its ore,” the Paragon said softly. A mountain of ore like this... in this entire universe, the number of people who would dare claim it for their own could be counted on one hand. The Paragon was one of them! But of course, if someone else had been the first to discover it, she wouldn't have been in a good position to intervene either.

Whoever was the first to discover such a fortune would be the one to own it. This was a shared rule which the supreme powers all abided by.

But of course, if a puny Emperor like Emperor Trisilk was the first to find it, the supreme powers would've been in a position to take it away by force! This was much like how Hydragon Mountain of the Endless Territories had been forcibly occupied by the almighty Brightshore Hegemon.

“Trisilk, that idiot... he probably wanted to keep this mountain for himself.” Emperor Gonflame snickered. “He never would've expected that Emperor Maniseal would chase after him like this. Poor bastard.”

“Trisilk is a selfish, vicious person by nature. Of course he would want to keep this mountain for himself.” The Paragon of Pills slowly shook her

head. “However... right now, there’s no one who can protect him. Maniseal has gone completely berserk. Even if the lord of the Church of Annihilation placed Trisilk under his personal protection, Trisilk would still have to perpetually stay within the lord’s headquarters. He would never be able to leave it ever again. If Trisilk was to ever come out... given how furious Maniseal is, he’ll definitely kill Trisilk.

Trisilk had been able to sense his disciple being killed and knew that the secret of his darkspace flamestone mine had been exposed. He was so terrified by this that he hid himself even more deeply! Right now, his nerves were completely frayed.

A berserk Maniseal truly was a terrifying person to behold. He had reached the true apex in the Dao of Seals. Although he was a bit weaker than the Paragon of Pills or the lord of the Church of Annihilation, neither of them would wish to make an enemy out of him! This was because neither of them felt confident that they would definitely be able to kill him.

“What an enormous mountain of ore. The Trileaf Realm will need to make good use of it and work hard to mine it.” The Paragon nodded. “The value of this ore is truly incalculable. Gonflame, go ahead and help Darknorth forge those six lifeblood weapons. I’ll provide all the materials you need! For us to gain such a mountain of ore at a cost of less than two hundred million cubes of chaos nectar... the more often something like this happens, the better.”

“Alright.” Emperor Gonflame laughed and nodded.

As for Ning, he couldn’t help but secretly sigh to himself. In truth, neither he nor any of his fellows such as Solewind or Greatjoy had any designs on this mountain! This was because not even most Eternal Emperors would dare to lay claim over it! In addition, Emperor Trisilk already knew about this place, which meant others would definitely find out as well.

Thus, the number of people in this universe who could fearlessly and openly lay claim to it truly could be counted on just one hand. Ning,

Greatjoy, and the others were all from another universe, and were mere World-level cultivators; there was no way they would ever have a chance to meet such supremely powerful figures! Even if they had such a chance, they wouldn't dare to act on it for fear of their true identities being exposed! What's more... for a weak figure like them to try and bargain with such supremely powerful figures might simply result in them being forcibly soulscoured.

Due to their many concerns, none of them had ever dared to reveal this secret to anyone else upon leaving the Sacred Immortal Realm.

Ning, however, had a very special relationship with the Paragon of Pills. She had treated him very well, and had even transmitted her [Seven Leafpill Chapters] to him. It could be said that they were family, which was why Ning dared to tell her about this mountain. If it wasn't for their special relationship, Ning would've forever kept this information hidden deep within his memories!

Chapter 46: Only Ji Ning Remains

The Paragon of Pills, Emperor Gonflame, and Ji Ning all stared at that distant mountain of darkspace flamestone. This was one of the many marvels birthed from the primordial chaos in this universe!

“Darknorth.” Emperor Gonflame suddenly said, “Six lifeblood weapons will take quite a bit of time. Even if I enter my estate and accelerate time, the smelting will still take tens of thousands of years. You’ll have to wait.”

Alchemy, artificing, seal-making, and other Daos all took enormous amounts of time. Major powers would generally carry out the process within estates that had temporal acceleration enchantments!

“Tens of thousands of years?” Ning laughed. “Then I’ll just wait patiently for those six lifeblood weapons.”

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Tens of thousands of years. This could be said to be a long period of time, but it could also be said to be a short period of time.

When Ji Ning’s group had originally come to this alternate universe, their journey to the Archaeus region alone had taken over ten thousand years! Even if he was still in the Genesis Lands, it would take well over ten thousand years to depart the Archaeus region and then start to head home. Given he was in the Trileaf Realm, he wouldn’t need to traverse the Archaeus region. In that respect, he had saved some time.

“I wonder when Solewind, Greatjoy, and the others will leave the Genesis Lands,” Ning murmured to himself within his residence in the Trileaf Realm.

As for Su Youji, she remained at the outer reaches side of the primessence chains, quietly waiting for Ning to return. Alas, it was guaranteed that she would never see him there!

Roughly six thousand years after Ning’s ‘abduction’, Heartlord Solewind emerged from the inner reaches and walked back to the outer reaches via the chains.

“Brother Solewind.” Firesurge and the others went to greet him.

“Master.” Immortal Swallowback greeted him as well.

“Heartlord Solewind, have you seen my master?” Su Youji immediately asked.

“Darknorth? He entered the inner reaches alongside me. Later on, we separated and didn’t meet again. What’s wrong?” The bald Heartlord Solewind was still dressed in the same loose, fiery-red robes he had been dressed in thousands of years ago. He couldn’t help but feel surprised by the question.

Su Youji immediately explained, “Six thousand years ago, I suddenly became unable to sense my master’s presence, but his message-talisman is still intact.”

“You can’t sense him?” Solewind’s face turned solemn as well. He had experienced many dangers within the world of the inner reaches and had nearly died as a result. In the end, though, he had survived and departed with a great fortune.

“The inner reaches are very difficult. It’s possible that brother Darknorth is trapped within one of its danger zones.” Heartlord Solewind was rather worried as well. “But... for there to be no news of him after six thousand years probably means that he really is in grave danger. Let’s wait for a while longer. He might still be alive.”

Another five thousand years went by.

By now, Prince Greatjoy had also returned from the inner reaches. He hadn’t seen Ji Ning either. This made Su Youji even more disappointed and worried.

More than three thousand years went by. Skyfire Brightshore finally rejoined the others as well. And so... everyone but Ji Ning had returned. Prince Greatjoy, Heartlord Solewind, Waterlord Firesurge, Skyfire Brightshore, Immortal Swallowback, World Goddess Skywolf, Flamefairy Su Youji... they were all present.

“We were all fairly lucky to make it out in one piece, but... brother

Darknorth has gone missing.” Prince Greatjoy frowned.

“He’s been missing for quite some time...” Firesurge slowly shook his head.

“My master is definitely alive,” Su Youji said.

Skyfire Brightshore said, “But we can’t just wait for him. He’s already been missing for ten thousand years. If we just keep waiting like this, who knows how long we’ll be here for? I think we should go back. If he’s still alive, he’ll go back as well once he comes out and realizes that we aren’t here.”

Solewind and Greatjoy exchanged glances. Their mission was chiefly to escort and protect Skyfire Brightshore! If Skyfire wished to go back, they really couldn’t stop him.

“Flamefairy, what Skyfire says makes sense. If brother Darknorth is still alive, he’ll go back on his own.” Solewind looked at Su Youji.

“And there’s no point to you waiting here by yourself,” Greatjoy said. “And... given how Darknorth suddenly disappeared, it’s also possible that he’s already left the Genesis Lands. In fact, he might’ve already gone back.”

“Gone back?” Su Youji stared. That... actually was possible. The Genesis Lands were filled with mysteries. It was entirely possible that some sort of special place might’ve teleported Ji Ning to another place in the universe. If that had actually happened, it wouldn’t make sense for Ji Ning to slowly travel all the way through the Archaeus region a second time! The Archaeus region was simply too large. Even someone as skilled in the Dao of Spacetime as Prince Greatjoy would need nearly ten thousand years to traverse it. If Ji Ning wished to traverse it, it would take him far longer.

“Perhaps brother Darknorth really did encounter a special situation, resulting in him going back to our universe,” Solewind said.

“Let’s go.”

“Let us return together. Darknorth is far stronger than you; he’s entirely capable of making it back on his own.”

“Flamefairy, we just might see Darknorth once we go back.”

They all urged her to return with them.

In all honesty, the many centuries of waiting had taken their toll on the Flamefairy as well, making her feel increasingly nervous. She also felt that it was entirely possible that Ji Ning really had encountered a special event that resulted in him being thrust out of the Archaeus region, and so she immediately nodded. “Alright. Let’s go back.”

All seven of them had reaped great rewards within the Genesis Lands! This was also the reason why they felt certain that Ji Ning had probably encountered something special as well. In the Genesis Lands, everything truly was possible.

Prince Greatjoy, Heartlord Solewind, and the others spent merely three thousand years before they were able to reach the transversal conduit and return to the Endless Territories. Clearly, Prince Greatjoy’s mastery over the Dao of Spacetime had increased dramatically, allowing them to travel much more quickly!

But upon returning to the Brightshore Kingdom, they found out that Ji Ning had yet to return! Su Youji was stunned by this news. She had no choice but to return to the Sword Palace of the Twelve Palaces and quietly wait there.

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The alternate universe. The Trileaf Realm.

There was no way for Ning to reach out to Greatjoy and the others. All he could do was patiently wait for those six lifeblood weapons to be forged. Only then could he leave the Trileaf Realm and return to the Endless Territories.

In the end, he did have to go back. His family and his friends were all back there, as was the Three Realms.

Within Ning’s estate-world.

Whoosh. Whoosh. Whoosh. The waters of the ocean lapped against the

sandy beaches, then receded again and again.

Ning sat there in the lotus position on the beach, his Immortal energy flowing as countless divine runes manifested around him. He was training in the pill-making techniques of the seventh chapter of the [Seven Leafpill Chapters].

Suddenly, a chubby figure flew over, a look of excitement on the man's face. "Master, I've already completely mastered the second chapter you bestowed upon me!" World God Pillsaint excitedly went straight towards Ning.

"Mm." Ning dispelled his Immortal energy, then looked at Pillsaint. "Then go ahead and produce a 'Thousand Songs' pill for me."

The Thousand Songs pill could be made very quickly, but it was a very complicated pill. It required fine control over a thousand different processes, each of which required tremendous skill and had exacting requirements. The first five chapters of the [Seven Leafpill Chapters] all used the 'Thousand Songs' pill as a way to test whether or not someone had successfully mastered a particular chapter.

This time, the pill-making process took a total of two days. Pillsaint had always been talented in the Dao of Alchemy, but he was now at least ten times better than he had been prior to coming to the Trileaf Realm.

"Very well. I'll bestow the third chapter upon you. Do your best to master it. If you can master it... a true fortune might very well be awaiting you," Ning said.

"A true fortune? What type of fortune?" Pillsaint was quite curious. In recent years, he had been completely focused on training in alchemy within Ning's estate-world. He had never wandered the Trileaf Realm, and so he had never heard of the Paragon of Pills.

"No point telling you just now." Ning shook his head. Even if Pillsaint did master the third chapter, it was up to the Paragon of Pills as to whether or not she wished to teach him more.

The Paragon of Pills was an exalted figure with incredibly high

expectations. All Ning could do was recommend potential apprentices to her. As to whether or not Pillsaint would be able to grasp this opportunity, that was completely up to him.

Swish. Ning waved his finger, tapping Pillsaint on his forehead and imparting the third chapter of the [Seven Leafpill Chapters] to him.

“Absolutely incredible! The person who created this alchemy method is absolutely incredible. I’ve only been learning from it for a short period of time, but my improvements in the Dao of Alchemy have been ridiculously high. I can sense that if I make just a few more breakthroughs, I can become a Daolord whenever I choose.” Pillsaint was extremely excited.

Ning warned softly, “Remember our oath!”

Pillsaint was stunned, then immediately nodded. Before returning to the Brightshore Kingdom, they absolutely could not afford to break through into the Daolord level.

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Life in the Trileaf Realm was quite relaxed. Ning had never been this relaxed before.

In the past, he had been wholly focused on the Dao of the Sword, but he had now completely mastered and linked together his five different Supreme Sword Daos. He could now completely relax, and in fact he had the vague feeling that relaxing was the correct decision. This was why he spent all his time within his estate-world, where the flow of time was a hundred times faster than the ‘normal’ rate of time. Thus, tens of thousands of years in ‘real’ time translated into millions of years of accelerated time.

Thirty thousand years of ‘real’ time went past in the blink of an eye within the Trileaf Realm.

A wild wind was blowing through the estate-world today. The waves of the sea were rolling forwards, with Ning seated leisurely atop the waves, watching as they rose and fell. In the stormy skies, the silhouette of a single sword could be seen flickering through various different sword-arts.

“Eh?” Ning suddenly frowned. “My sword arts... I feel as though...”

Ning had spent over three million years relaxing in his estate-world after mastering and linking together his five Supreme Daos. Now, all of a sudden, Ning felt as though his sword-arts were still lacking in some manner.

“This... this still isn’t the ultimate Dao of the Sword!” This thought suddenly flashed through Ning’s mind. After three million years of training in sword-arts, he suddenly had this premonition. For people who had trained to this level, these premonitions were usually highly accurate.

Chapter 47: Kindness and Gratitude

“I’m still missing something.” Ji Ning frowned as he sat there atop the wave, the sword silhouette in the air continuing to execute sword-arts.

“It doesn’t make sense. I’ve clearly mastered all five Supreme Daos and joined them together perfectly.” Ning tested his sword-arts out repeatedly. “So why is it that I feel like I’m lacking something?”

“What exactly am I missing?”

Again and again and again, Ning used his sword to execute his various sword-arts.

“BAH!” He spent five nights and five days testing things out, only to make no improvements at all. Ning couldn’t help but let out a rather frustrated howl, his voice reverberating within the skies of this estate-world. The wavy waters of the entire sea suddenly fell flat and turned completely still, almost as if it had been frozen in place. Not a single wave could be seen.

“Whew.” Ning drew a long breath, allowing the frozen seas to return to normal and the waves to arise once more.

“Perhaps I’m being a bit too impatient,” Ning murmured softly.

In truth, Ning was not to be blamed. He had felt certain that he had already found his strongest Supreme Daos, but now he suddenly had the feeling that his Sword Dao was still lacking in something. This meant his Supreme Dao wasn’t actually ‘supreme’. Of course he was irritated by this!

“To be able to notice flaws in my Sword Dao is a good thing. It’s certainly better than not even realizing my own imperfection.” Ning regained his normal calm. “I should focus on calmly meditating on my sword-arts again. Perhaps when enough time, I’ll be able to naturally break through to the next level.”

“My five Supreme Daos are already joined together perfectly. If I can make another breakthrough...” Ning was puzzled. “I’ve never even heard of something like this.”

Bertulu, Eastcult, and the other monstrously talented geniuses all generally mastered multiple Supreme Daos, then fitted them together perfectly. This represented the utmost apex of power. This was what many major powers all believed to be true! Previously, Ning had believed it to be true as well... but now, he suddenly discovered that it wasn't necessarily the apex.

.....

Ning spent even more of the coming years on his sword-arts, but of course he spent some time on the pill-making techniques of the [Seven Leafpill Chapters] as well.

Soon, more than fifty thousand years had gone past since his initial entry into the Trileaf Realm.

"I've finally mastered it. How truly inconceivable! At the World level, I've actually managed to master the quadressence thunder."

Ning stood there at the peak of a mountain, his eyes flashing. Instantly, a streak of golden lightning shot out of him.

This bolt of golden lightning was filled with an aura of sharpness. This was Ning's newly created quadressence thunder! When Ning had first started to train in alchemy, he had been able to immediately master the tri-essence thunder and the quadressence water. Now that he had spent five million years of accelerated time training in alchemy, he had made tremendous strides in this field. In pill-making, Ning was superior to even Pillsaint. Pillsaint was still working on the third chapter, after all. Ning was working on the seventh chapter!

"Daolord Allgod once said that a Daolord of the First Step would have a chance at mastering the tri-essence thunder." Ning laughed. "I'm at the World level, but I've actually mastered the quadressence thunder. Haha..."

His azureflower mist energy was comparable to a Daolord's energy, and his pill-making arts were absolutely unearthly as well. This was why he was able to produce such miraculous results.

"Now, I have quadressence thunder and quadressence water." Ning

willed them all to come out.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

A dazzling bolt of golden lightning and a crystalline stream of jade green water instantly filled the skies, transforming into an incomparably terrifying domain of sword-intent! The Yin-Yang Sword Domain was now definitely Ning's most powerful killer attack. The quadressence thunder and the quadressence water could unleash ruinously powerful attacks that would heavily injure even Daolords of the Second Step. When they were used in this domain of sword-intent... they could actually wipe those second step Daolords out!

For now, Ning truly had reached his limit in terms of controlling lightning and water. He had no chance at all of completing pentessence water; most likely, he would have to first become a Daolord.

Roughly a thousand years passed after Ning had mastered his quadressence thunder.

"Master! Master! I've succeeded. I've succeeded!" World God Pillsaint came flying in search of Ning.

"Follow me." After ascertaining that Pillsaint had indeed completely mastered the third chapter, Ning immediately led Pillsaint out of his estate-world, taking him to pay a visit to the Paragon of Pills.

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"Come in."

Ning couldn't help but shiver when he saw that dark, icy-cold estate. He couldn't help but sigh as well. Why did the Paragon have to live by herself in a place like this? Why?

As Ning lamented silently, he led Pillsaint into the estate.

The Paragon of Pills was seated in the lotus position before the enormous pill cauldron, her black gauzy robes spread across her and over the ground.

"Darknorth." The Paragon glanced at Ning, her gaze turning much

gentler than before.

“Greetings, Paragon,” Ning said respectfully. As for Pillsaint, he obediently fell to his knees and kowtowed.

“Sit,” the Paragon instructed.

Although she told them to sit, in reality they merely sat on the ground in the lotus position as well. Pillsaint snuck a glance at the Paragon, but didn’t dare to stare directly at her. He simply felt rather puzzled... he could clearly see her, but why was it that he kept on feeling as though he couldn’t make out her features?

“Paragon,” Ning said.

“If you don’t mind, you can simply address me as ‘Mistress’,” the Paragon of Pills said.

“Mistress,” Ning called out obediently. He already had a vague understanding of what the relationship between the Paragon and the deceased Hegemon had been like, and also understood how the Paragon felt about him as a result.

The Paragon of Pills nodded. “Have you brought this young fellow to me because of the [Seven Leafpill Chapters]?”

Ning nodded. “He is my retainer, World God Pillsaint. I have already transmitted the first three chapters to him, and he has mastered them all. That is why I have brought him here.”

“Then refine a cauldron of Thousand Songs pills.” The Paragon glanced at Pillsaint, her eyes quite calm. She didn’t really care that much about so-called ‘alchemy geniuses’; Hegemons rarely were very eager to take on new disciples. They themselves could live for countless years; why would they have to find people to teach their skills to?

Only truly exceptional geniuses that they also took a personal liking to would be accepted as disciples. She treated Ning in a very special manner, and as a result she held a certain fondness for those connected to him. This was why she was willing to give Pillsaint a chance.

“Yes.” Pillsaint understood that this moment was a moment which could change his destiny. In truth, as soon as he saw that enormous lake of chaos nectar he had been rather stunned. He immediately began to work on refining pills.

Pillsaint was extremely careful, and his cauldron of pills was quite good.

“Not bad. Darknorth, how long did your retainer need in order to master the three chapters?” Pillsaint asked.

“He’s been in my estate-world this entire time, where time moves a hundred times faster than normal. Thus... he should’ve spent more than five million ‘accelerated’ years,” Ning answered honestly. Lying in front of a major power like her would be utterly stupid.

The Paragon of Pills frowned slightly. More than five million years to just learn three chapters? Given her standards, this was fairly slow! She generally only accepted the most elite of disciples, people like Bertulu or Ji Ning. Although Pillsaint was extremely talented in alchemy, he still wasn’t quite at her mark.

“You can become one of my honorary disciples, I suppose.” The Paragon said calmly, “I shall transmit the first six chapters of the [Seven Leafpill Chapters] to you. Swear an oath to never disseminate it to others.”

“Yes.” Pillsaint was actually overjoyed. Being able to learn the first six chapters was already quite incredible.

The Paragon bestowed a golden medallion upon him, and it immediately merged into his body once he touched it, filling his mind with certain memories as well as forcing him to involuntarily swear a lifeblood oath. Clearly, the Paragon wasn’t being nearly as gentle with him as she had been with Ning.

“Thank you, Master.” After fully memorizing the technique, Pillsaint was absolutely delighted. He immediately kowtowed respectfully to express his gratitude.

The first six chapters alone would still allow Pillsaint to vastly outstrip Daolord Allgod in alchemy. Many of the pill formulas included within the

first six chapters were actually pills which only Eternal Emperors could create.

As for the seventh chapter, it contained the Paragon's most elite techniques. She wouldn't casually teach it to outsiders.

"You are Darknorth's retainer, yes? Make sure you serve him loyally. If you betray him, do not blame me for showing you no mercy," the Paragon said.

"Your disciple understands," Pillsaint said respectfully. In truth, he could tell that this opportunity was most likely all thanks to the Paragon's relationship with Ji Ning.

"Thank you, Mistress." Ning felt gratitude as well. The Paragon of Pills truly did treat him well.

"Gonflame should be able to complete your lifeblood weapons within another ten thousand years." The Paragon looked at Ning. "My divinations are whispering to me that you probably leave upon acquiring those weapons."

"Yes." Ning nodded respectfully.

"My divinations indicate that once you leave, it will be a long, long time before the two of us ever meet again!" The Paragon said. "Thus... you must be very careful on your path of cultivation. If you encounter any serious issues, you can use my name to warn those who would harm you. It might be of some use. Also... true major powers have all types of abilities. Don't rely too much on any single type of life-saving measure."

"For example... my calculations indicate that you have a Primaltwin. However, certain major powers who wish to kill you can use certain karma techniques to completely annihilate your truesoul, be it that of your true body or your Primaltwin," the Paragon said. "Karma techniques are extremely formidable, and have effects similar to that of lifeblood oaths. They can follow those secret, hidden connections and wipe out the truesouls of all of your clones and bodies."

Ning couldn't help but feel speechless and amazed upon hearing this.

Once a lifeblood oath was violated, all bodies would be annihilated, true... but there were actually attack techniques that could achieve the same results? This was utterly terrifying.

“In the future, you shall understand how powerful the ‘major powers’ truly are,” the Paragon said. “Thus, you absolutely must be careful in your path of cultivation. That way, the two of us might have a chance to meet again in the future. You may go now. It won’t be necessary for you to come and say farewell to me when you leave.”

“Yes, Mistress.” Ning respectfully fell to his knees, expressing his gratitude.

Although they had only met each other a few times, Ning could sense that the Paragon of Pills truly held nothing back from him and did not plot against him at all. She truly was doing what she thought was best for him.

In his mind, Ning viewed her as he would a close friend or a beloved senior. He silently memorized the kindnesses she had shown him. For now, though, he was still very weak. Repay her kindness? That was something for the distant future.

Chapter 48: The Return

After bidding the Paragon farewell, Ji Ning couldn't help but feel slightly emotional. After this parting, who knew how long it would be for them to meet again? The Paragon of Pills lived in a different universe, after all. Ning would be living in the Endless Territories! Alas, he had to go back.

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More than sixty thousand years after he had arrived in the Trileaf Realm, Emperor Gonflame sent a servant to carry a message to him.

"Emperor Gonflame wishes to meet me?" Ning revealed a look of joy.

"As soon as the Emperor left his estate-world, he immediately ordered me to come meet you, fellow Daoist." The extremely muscular azure-garbed Daolord continued, "Fellow Daoist, please follow me over right away."

"Yes, let's go right away." Ning had been waiting impatiently for some time now. He had spent more than sixty thousand years for the sake of this lifeblood weapon.

Swoosh. Swoosh.

Two streaks of light shot through the skies, heading straight towards Emperor Gonflame's palace.

Emperor Gonflame's estate was at the margins of the Trileaf Realm. However, there were many cultivators here. Emperor Gonflame's treasures were simply too alluring; even though most of the cultivators couldn't afford to actually buy them, just having the chance to look at them was a chance for them to expand their horizons.

"Please come this way." The azure-garbed Daolord led Ning straight into the estate, and they soon arrived in a private courtyard.

"Master, I've brought Darknorth to you," the azure-robed Daolord said respectfully.

"You can go. Darknorth, come, sit." Emperor Gonflame was seated, a

proud smile on his face. Each time he forged some treasures he particularly liked, he would always feel a bit smug. He always did enjoy forging treasures, and it was that genuine affection for his art, combined with his incredible talent as well as the guidance of the Paragon of Pills, which led him to become the number one artificer of this entire universe.

Ning suppressed his excitement and sat down.

“Look at you. I bet the only thing you care about right now are those swords.” Emperor Gonflame started to laugh. “Alright, I’ll stop teasing you. Look. These are your six lifeblood weapons.” As he spoke, he waved his hand and caused a pitch-black scabbard to appear next to him, with six swords ‘folded’ together inside of it.

“One scabbard, six swords.” Emperor Gonflame smiled. “You can carry all of them at the same time. Lifeblood weapons are unlike other weapons. These are freshly forged, and they don’t even have Sword Dao quintessences within them. They are completely fresh and blank slates; they don’t even have sword-spirits yet. Thus, they’ll be relying on you to pour your own Sword Dao into them to form their quintessences and give birth to their sword-spirits. How far they will be able to develop will be completely up to you.”

Ning stared at the pitch-black scabbard hovering before him and the six swords within them. Ning waved his hand. Whoosh! Instantly, the six swords all flew out.

Every single sword seemed quite ordinary. The blades were very thin but also incredibly sharp.

“Bind them first.” Emperor Gonflame looked at Ning. “You do know how to bind lifeblood swords, right?”

“Fill them with my own blood and nourish them with my own spirit, right?” Ning asked. He was a sword cultivator, after all. Although acquiring lifeblood weapons was quite difficult, he did know how one should bind one if one was lucky enough to acquire one.

“Right.” Emperor Gonflame nodded. “Work hard and take care of those swords. As for the scabbard, you don’t need to spend any effort on it. It’s

nothing more than an ordinary top-grade Eternal treasure, with no special properties. I just casually made it into a shape that fits the swords.”

The scabbard and the six swords hovered in front of Ning. Ning stretched out his hand, a wound suddenly appearing within his palm. Blood immediately spurted out. Under Ning’s control, the blood flew out in six streams and covered all six of those swords.

The six swords were all pitch-black in color. Like nursing babies, they absorbed Ning’s fresh blood. The blood spread out over them like a spider web as more and more of it was absorbed into the swords.

To Ning, blood was nothing more than a manifestation of his divine power. After using up more than half of his divine power, his six swords were finally ‘full’.

Whoosh. Ning sent out strands of his divine will towards those six swords. The six swords had absorbed much of Ning’s blood, which contained both his divine power as well as tiny parts of his truesoul. As a result, the swords naturally wouldn’t resist Ning’s will, allowing it burrow deep within their ‘bodies’.

Ning’s divine will completely surrounded the six swords, almost like the embrace of a mother.

Slowly... the six swords began to change internally in a dramatic fashion, almost like how Pangu had been born from the primordial chaos. The six swords were already filled with Ning’s blood. Now, under the guidance and nurturing power of Ning’s soul and will, they began to gain sentience. In truth, this sentience was akin to that of a living being’s; they would be intelligent, grow, and even cultivate independently. This was what the giant bear of Daoist Threelives’ Starseizing Manor had done.

“Whoah.”

“Wow.”

“Ah.”

One voice after another cried out as child-like figures began to appear from the surfaces of the six swords. Because of Ning’s own soul and

true soul having influenced their creation, they were born looking like human children.

All of them seemed quite puzzled. As 'newborns' who had just come into existence, they didn't even know how to speak.

"Hello, kids." When Ning saw those six sword-spirits arise, he suddenly sensed a powerful sense of kinship towards them. In the past, whenever he had bound magic treasures he would be connected to them as well, but those were just ordinary connections. This time...

It was a feeling almost akin to when he had first seen his daughter Brightmoon. It was a connection that came from the deepest parts of his true soul, a true connection on the most basic of levels. He felt almost like a father towards them! This was another reason why these weapons were referred to as 'lifeblood' weapons.

"Be good now." Ning smiled as he looked at the six of them. They all looked like babies, and all of them were completely naked. Ning laughed as he used his divine will to convey some information to them. In the end, they weren't mortal children; they grew and learned quite quickly. As soon as Ning sent them some information, they almost immediately learned how to speak.

"Master."

"Master!"

"Hey, so you are our master?"

The six young fellows all began to call out simultaneously.

Ning couldn't help but feel a bit helpless. Although they had quickly mastered the concept of language, it would take time for them to grow more intelligent. Right now, they were too young and too innocent.

"From this day forth, you will be ranked in accordance with how quickly you woke up. So you'll be number one, you'll be number two, you'll be number three..." Ning gave all of them rankings.

"Haha." Emperor Gonflame started to laugh. "Darknorth, have you

started to view them as your own children?”

Ning was startled. They were just swords, right? But indeed, he had given them a ‘birth order’ as he might’ve given actual children.

“Many major powers will treat their lifeblood weapons as their own children.” Emperor Gonflame sighed. “It isn’t surprising at all. In the future, it’ll be up to you to help them grow and become stronger. The relationship between you and your swords will only strengthen and deepen. A tiny number of incredible lifeblood weapons will break through to the Universe level, but those Universe treasures will still feel tremendous love and affection for their first master. This is why.”

Ning nodded slowly. The Universe sword belonging to the deceased Hegemon of the sword refused to accept Ning, precisely because it wanted to choose someone whose personality was more similar to the Hegemon’s.

“From this day forth, the six of them shall forever be by your side. They shall venture into battle by your side and brave danger with you,” Emperor Gonflame said. “Treat them well.”

“Understood.” Ning looked at his six swords. This was the first time he truly felt as though his magic treasures were his family members.

“The six of you... you shall be called the Northbow swords,” Ning said.

Northbow. North, because his own Daoist title was Darknorth. Bow, because ‘Rainbowflame Fairy’ was Yu Wei’s Daoist title. His greatest ambition, his purpose behind wanting to become stronger and reach the apex, was in large part because he wanted to bring her back to life. If it hadn’t been for her... even though he would still pursue the path of a cultivator, he wouldn’t be as frenzied as he currently was.

With Northbow swords in hand, he would carve a grand path for himself through the thistles and thorns that filled the path of cultivation.

“Northbow swords? Then I’ll be Boss Northbow.”

“I like that name!”

“I’ll be Northbow Three.”

“I’ll be Northbow Four!”

They all called out, one after the other. However... the final sword, ‘Northbow Six’, just shook his head and let out a disdainful snort.

Ning blinked, then started to laugh. He then sent out his will, causing his sword-intent to pour into the six swords. Ning’s five Supreme Daos began to link together once more as his sword-intents joined together, coiling into the six swords and transforming into their quintessence cores.

Instantly, the auras of the six swords expanded dramatically. Their auras exploded outwards in an awe-inspiring fashion, and the six young fellows revealed looks of delight as well.

“Come in.” Ning willed it, instantly causing all six swords to fly into the scabbard on his back.

“Right now, in terms of quality they are already comparable to top-grade Eternal weapons,” Emperor Gonflame said. “However, they will continue to grow and advance towards the Universe level. Although it is incredibly difficult for lifeblood treasures to grow to become Universe treasures, they’ll continue to strengthen as they grow. Thus, they’ll need to consume various types of materials and ingredients. It’ll be up to you to provide them.”

“Understood.” Ning smiled and nodded. “Helping raise them is part of my responsibilities.”

“Haha, right. ‘Raise’ them well.” Emperor Gonflame smiled as well.

“Emperor, I won’t thank you because mere words will not suffice. I bid you farewell,” Ning said gratefully.

“Mm.” Emperor Gonflame nodded.

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That very day, Ning had Daolord Yuhong guide him out of the Trileaf Realm.

“Here is a star map of our universe. Our Trileaf Realm has three spacetime tunnels that lead to three different parts of this universe,”

Daolord Yuhong explained.

Ning chose the tunnel that led to an exit closest to the place he had to go.

“Here’s the spacetime tunnel which Master constructed. She is the only one capable of creating spacetime tunnels which traverse virtually the entirety of our universe.” Daolord Yuhong pointed at the enormous, pitch-black vortex up ahead.

“Alright.” Ning turned his head to stare off into the distance, then stepped into the black vortex.

At that very moment, a cold, black-garbed figure was standing outside the Paragon’s estate. The black-garbed Paragon of Pills stared off into the distance. She was able to see the white-robed youth with the black scabbard on his back, and she watched as he stepped into the spacetime tunnel and departed her Trileaf Realm.

Credits

Translator: [Iewatermelons](#)

Epub: [Estevam](#) / [dotNOVEL](#)